



JOLLY
GOOD TIMES
To-DAY

MARY P. W. SMITH



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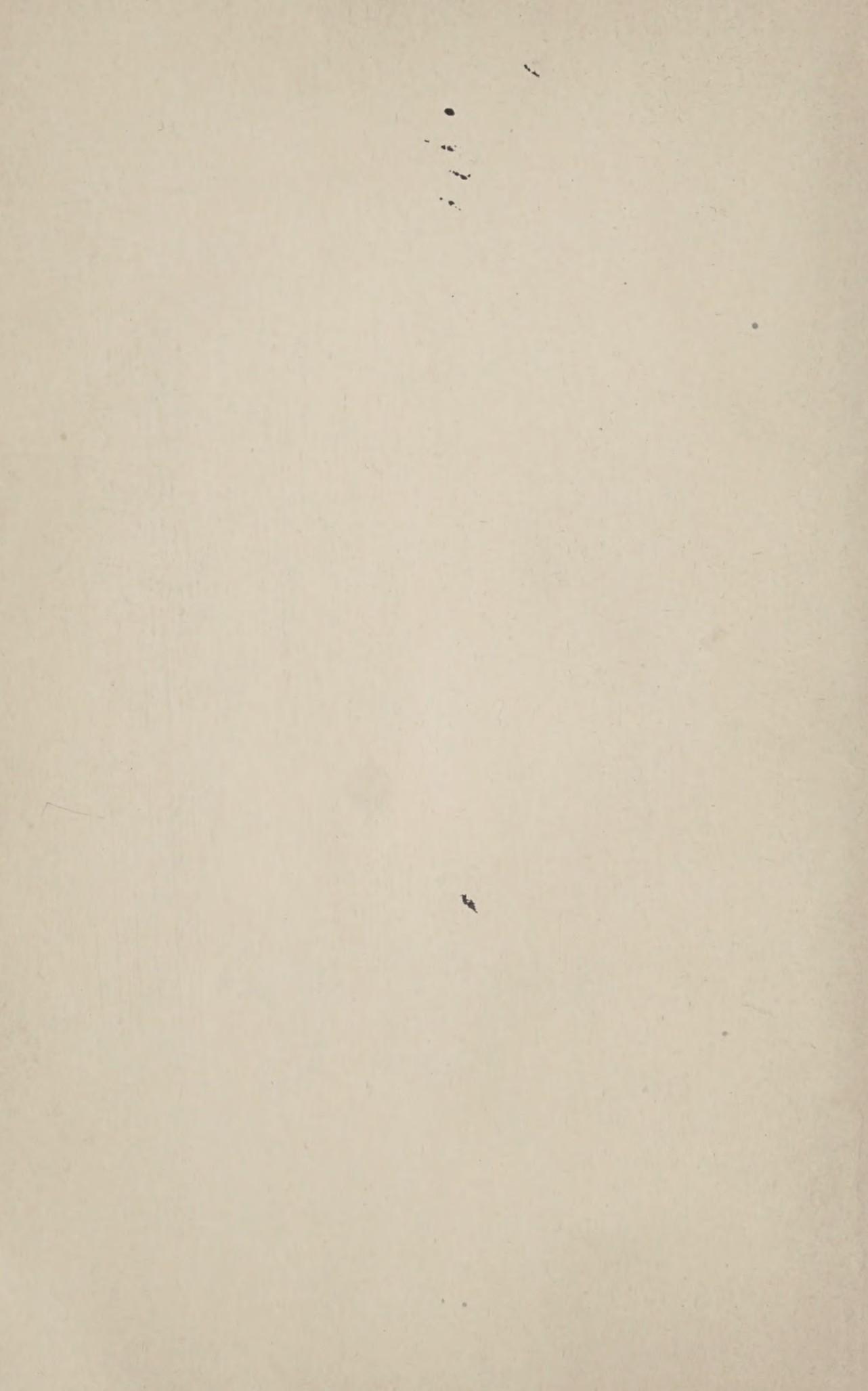
JOLLY GOOD TIMES TO-DAY.



"What are you drawing, Amy? May I see it?"



Amy, Kitty, and Rob laden with enormous slabs of stone.



JOLLY GOOD TIMES TO-DAY.

BY

MARY P. WELLS SMITH,

AUTHOR OF "JOLLY GOOD TIMES; OR, CHILD-LIFE ON A FARM,"
"JOLLY GOOD TIMES AT SCHOOL," "THE BROWNS,"
"THEIR CANOE TRIP," "JOLLY GOOD TIMES
AT HACKMATACK," "MORE GOOD
TIMES AT HACKMATACK."



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TO
AGNES MARY.

"DEAR HEART, thou camest with gentle step; thou hast gone,
leaving the gentle impress of thy footprints on Earth-land; from
whence and whither? We know only *out* of God's hand, *into* God's
hand."

AFTERGLOW: *Frederic A. Hinckley.*

"What is excellent,
As God lives, is permanent;
Hearts are dust, hearts' loves remain;
Heart's love will meet thee again."

THRENODY: *Ralph Waldo Emerson.*

"For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things
which are not seen are eternal."

2 CORINTHIANS iv. 18: *Paul.*

P R E F A C E.

AS the title of this book implies, it aims to depict, not the pleasures enjoyed at Hackmatack or elsewhere, fifty years ago, but those of the children here and now. Nothing could afford a greater contrast, or illustrate more clearly the change in manners and habits during the last half-century in this country, than the difference between the lives and training of children now and then. In a wholly different world from that of their grandfathers, are the children of to-day growing up.

We often hear that American children are being ruined by indulgence. This is undoubtedly true in some cases. But so bright and intelligent, so kindly and generous, so readily moved to helpfulness of those less fortunate than themselves, are the girls and boys whom it is my good fortune to know, that I cannot borrow much trouble about the future of our country when theirs, and such as theirs, shall be the hands that guide her

destinies. Their “jolly” times are quite as apt to be “good,” as their “good” times are sure to be “jolly.”

This book was begun to please a child who loved it as the chapters went on, and called it fondly “*my book.*” Before its completion, she vanished for a time from our sight into that unseen world whose light always shone around her; but still the book is finished, as it was begun, for her.

MARY P. WELLS SMITH.

AVONDALE, CINCINNATI, OHIO,
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JOLLY GOOD TIMES TO-DAY.

CHAPTER I.

HILLSIDE AVENUE.

“MARGERY HAYWOOD says she thinks Friday night is the nicest night in the week,” remarked Amy at the dinner-table one Friday night; “and so do I, too.”

“Why so?” asked her father.

“Because you have a whole Saturday ahead to play in. Oh, I do hope it will be a pleasant day to-morrow! I’m going to bed very early to-night.”

“What, and forsake Elizabeth and Jane?” asked her mother.

“Ye-es,” said Amy, a little doubtfully, for she was intensely interested in reading “Pride and Prejudice,” “though they’re in awful trouble just now, and Mr. Collins is so funny. But I must, for I promised Kitty I would get up real early to-morrow morning. We mean to have lots of fun. You will be sure to wake me early, won’t you, mamma?”

Mrs. Strong promised, but her aid was not needed; for the first thing she heard when she woke, Saturday morning, was Kitty Clover’s call under Amy’s window. Kitty had a private signal for Amy not unlike a loud purr.

"Pur-r-r," went Kitty. Then there was the loud, animated barking of a dog, and a boy's voice said,—

"That's right, old Duke. Speak up!"

"Amy! Oh, Amy! Amy Strong!" called Kitty, when her call brought no response.

"What is it?" came in rather sleepy tones from Amy's room; then, more briskly, "Oh, is it you, Kitty? All right. I'll be down right away."

There was an unusually brisk flying around in Amy's room, and presently a tap at Mrs. Strong's door. "Can we have breakfast soon, mamma? I'm in a great hurry."

"I am delighted to hear it," said her mother; for Amy's chief fault was a disposition to think that there was always "time enough," and that it was better to do things "by and by," or "pretty soon," or "in a minute," rather than now. This tendency was made worse by Amy's passion for reading. Once seated with a book, and Amy was lost to the outside world; as her mother sometimes said,—

"You might almost as well try to pull up a tree, roots and all, as move Amy when she is once launched in a book."

If Mrs. Strong happened to add, "She is exactly like her father," Professor Strong looked rather pleased than otherwise; for Amy was an unusually bright, intelligent child, and the one little daughter was the late blooming flower of his old age. A wise and learned professor, he had married rather late in life a lady much younger than himself, whose lively temperament well supplemented his own slower, graver nature. Three sons had been born to them. One had died in childhood; the others,

Sydney and Philip, were grown up, married, and living, Sydney in Boston, and Philip at present in Europe. When the boys were well grown, the Stronges had been delighted by the arrival of the much-longed-for "little sister," whose coming had been despaired of. Had Amy been spoilable, her prospects of being spoiled were certainly as fair as child ever had; for, besides being peculiarly precious as an only daughter, and the youngest child, bright and precocious mentally, she was delicate and nervous, requiring tenderer care and more indulgence than sturdier children. But Amy's nature was gentle, sweet, and reasonable, and so she shed all the spoiling.

On account of her health, the Stronges moved out from the city of Cincinnati to the beautiful hill-top suburb of Edgeton. Hillside Avenue, when they built on it, had only a few scattered houses, and was almost like the real country. The residents kept cows who were pastured on the vacant lots, and they, the hens and ducks, and the Bonds' pony, rambled about at their own sweet will, sometimes much to the annoyance of Mrs. Strong, who was devoted to flower culture. There were then few children on the avenue, and those of Amy's age were, unluckily, all boys, so that little Amy had no playmates; but having never had them, she did not miss them, being perfectly happy in her own inventions. She lived much of the time in an imaginary world of her own, called "Our Land," belonging to her and her doll children, and the fairies and brownies. Amy was the Head Princess of Our Land, and wonderful events were always happening there. This land lay, so Amy said, "way, way off in the sky, far beyond heaven."

Amy's chief servant in Our Land was the Bulusk, and her great enemy the Rub-a-dub, the chief of the Blue Indians,—a savage tribe with whom Amy and her subjects had many conflicts. Terrible fellows were the Blue Indians, if one might believe the pictures that Amy drew and painted of them. Their complexion was always a deep blue, while their heads bristled with red feathers. Once Amy painted the Rub-a-dub purple. Philip, who was often admitted to the secrets of Our Land, said, —

“Why, I thought the old fellow was blue.”

“I made him purple to-day,” said Amy, “because he feels purple. The Bulusk and Tree-fox —”

“Tree-fox ?” said Philip. “Who 's he ?”

“Why, did n't I ever tell you about Tree-fox ? He 's one of my smartest children in Our Land. He and the Bulusk have just had a terrible battle with the Blue Indians. They drove them back from my palace, and they caught the Rub-a-dub and tortured him with the Giganter.”

“And what is that, may I ask ?” said Philip.

“The Giganter,” said Amy, in the earnest tone of one who relates important facts, “is my chief instrument of torture. It is shaped like the thing mamma throws powder on her plants with, only it is as big as our house.”

“I don't wonder the Rub-a-dub feels purple,” said Philip ; “I should myself.”

As has been seen, Our Land had a language of its own. One day, when there was turkey for dinner, Amy surprised the family by observing, —

“How delicious ! it smells like a billy-gogue.”

“A what ?” asked her father, pausing with uplifted carving-knife.

“A billy-gogue ; just like synagogue, you know,

only it's billy-gogue. It's something we have in Our Land that's very nice."

A favorite book was often described as "perfectly billy-gogue-ish." Anything provoking was "vexious," anything nice, "luxious." Amy sometimes said, "Though you see me here, I'm not; I'm really in Our Land."

When Philip came home in college vacations, he was Amy's best playfellow. He built her a nice seat under the big elms, and a still nicer one up high, between a little group of three ailanthus-trees, which seat was the favorite throne of the Head Princess of Our Land, where, far up among the leafy branches, she passed many happy hours.

In Christmas vacation, he made her a wonderful snow-man, and snowballed her, and drew her about on her little sled, making a very fast horse, a little too lively sometimes, when he purposely tipped her off, and Amy, muffled in leggings, wraps, and mittens, rolled helplessly about in the snow. He played the piano and sang to her, "Oh, dem golden slippers," "Peekabo," and funny college songs.

But, best of all, Philip was so kind and patient. He would sit at the desk for hours and write down Amy's poems, as the small poetess sat perched in a big chair beside him, her short legs swinging in the ardor of inspiration, and poured out the "poems." She had confided to Philip her plans for the future. "I am going to be a poetess when I grow up, and ride Pegasus, and make him fly higher than he ever went before, *way* up, past the sky!"

Amy would say, "The name of it, Philip, is 'Brooks and Bees.' Have you written that down? Now write this. —

"BROOKS AND BEES."

"In the cool daylight and the dark evening light,
 When the sun shines bright and the moon shines bright,
 When the owl comes along with a bird or a fowl,
 In the dark evening dusk when the bells do ring,
 The daylight sings, down below, down below.
 Is it so ? Is it so ? Do you know ? Do you know ?
 That the daylight has come, under sunny skies of snow ?
 Is it so ? Is it so ? Do you know ? Do you know ? "

Philip always rebelled, and refused to write down any more poetry, when it began to run into these repetitions,—a sure sign that inspiration was giving out. He also rebelled on this poem :—

"One, two, three ;
 The winds come from the sea !"

"Now that begins nicely, Amy," said Philip. " Go on, and dictate me a pretty poem."

Amy continued :—

"One, two, three, four ;
 Roar !
 One, two, three, four, five ;
 The bees are in the bee-hive."

Philip persevered until it came to —

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight ;
 Set the giant on the gate."

"That's enough of that kind of poetry," said Philip, laying down the pencil.

"That isibble-dabble poetry," said Amy, complacently. "We write it a great deal in Our Land."

The following poem Philip thought well of, and so

indeed did Amy, illustrating it with amazing pictures of the lovers, the moon, and the frog :—

“Down in the shade of an old willow-tree
The little brook rushes past ;
And there by the brook two lovers sit,
Dreaming of future and past.
The little frogs warble their singular notes,
And the moon rises over the hill.”

Sometimes, like older poets, she grappled with deep topics, as in this effort :—

“Beauty is the nature of life,
With its enemies doth it strife.”

A poem that Amy wrote about this time, one night when she and her mother, on a trip east, had missed connections, and were drearily waiting in the Cleveland station for their car, named the “Peoria,” was justly admired by her family :—

“Peoria, Peoria,
When wilt thou come
In sight ?
Peoria, Peoria,
It’s getting late
At night.

“Oh, Porter, oh, Porter,
Won’t you please to make
My berth ?
Oh, Porter, oh, Porter,
For us there is no pleasant
Fireside hearth !”

Many of the poems were religious, for Amy’s little heart was full of undoubting faith in God and His

goodness. When the first snow came, Amy felt moved to dictate this poem, in "blank" verse: —

THE SOFTLY FALLING SNOWFLAKES.

Snowflakes falling soft and sweet
Make the air full of fragrance.
The softly falling snow comes down
In little snowflakes. Oh, what a pretty sight,
To see the branches all plumed with snow,
And the ground covered with its white sheet !
The Lord has sent His angel
To send a pleasure to His little ones.
Running, skipping, hopping, jumping,
All the pleasant voices ringing
Like music through the street.
And still the little snowflakes fall
Pitty-patty on the porch, and on the roofs of the houses.
Good-by, all the snowflakes.

Amy's love of nature shone out, too, in the poems. One pleasant spring morning, she dictated a poem beginning, —

"Flowers as heaven-bells do ring
These bright and cheerful days."

Dull grown-up people might not perceive the fragrance of the snowflakes, or hear the daylight sing, or the heaven-bells ring, but Amy's little heart danced to their music all day long.

But all this was when Amy was much younger. She was quite able to write down her own poems now, which was fortunate, for Philip was far away. After graduating at college, he had married a Miss Gladys Van Dyke of New York, a descendant of one of the old Dutch families, and, if one might believe half that Philip wrote of her, the most charming

creature that ever lucky man was permitted to call his own. She had a wonderful soprano voice; and as Philip had a fine baritone voice, and his bent was wholly toward music, they had gone abroad to study, and Amy had never yet seen the fascinating new sister.

Amy was sent to kindergarten, where she was very happy; but her chief happiness was in a dream world of her own. She was always making up fanciful stories, and then illustrating them. Table and writing-desk in the library were often strewn with pictures of fairies, kings and queens, lords and ladies of high degree, while an odor of turpentine and gilt paint, more strong than agreeable, permeated the house. She burrowed in books far beyond her years; and she was growing up pale and slender, palpably spindling and pining for want of fresh air and exercise. She was apt to have a cough in winter, and was troubled with bad dreams and nervous crying spells. Not being strong enough to attend school, when too old for the kindergarten she studied and recited at home to her parents.

Professor and Mrs. Strong realized that it was not well for Amy to live so much alone, and use her too active brain so hard; but how should that busy brain be kept more quiet, the slender body built up?

"What book is Amy buried in now?" asked the professor, as he saw Amy in the library, curled up in a big chair, with a large book, lost to all going on around her.

"Shakespeare," said Mrs. Strong. "'The Merchant of Venice.' She says Shylock is the most 'vexious' character she ever knew."

The professor laughed, but said, —

“It’s all wrong. She ought to be playing outdoors. It would be a blessing to the child if she could not get hold of a book for a year.”

“I sometimes think I shall have to adopt a little girl expressly to play with Amy,” said Mrs. Strong.

But now happily the march of progress came to Amy’s rescue. An electric road was built to Edgeton, which had hitherto been connected with the city only by an omnibus line. The three miles to the city became practically a short quarter of a mile. Syndicates began to buy up Edgeton land; new streets were opened on every side; and a real-estate “boom” struck quiet Hillside Avenue. Handsome modern residences sprang up around the Strongs, until their one acre came to have quite a park-like effect in the thickly settled neighborhood, being the largest open space left on the street. To Mrs. Strong’s delight, the lots each side of their own were bought by friends of theirs, attending the same church. The Clovers bought one side of them, the Carmans the other.

This was all very pleasant, but other phases of the change were not by any means so agreeable. For a time, Hillside Avenue was torn up from one end to the other. On all sides, cellar-holes were being dug, great piles of stone, bricks, and lumber cumbered the ground, while carts hauling earth, and heavy wagons laden with timber, framework, mortar-beds, and what not, wore deep ruts in the street by their steady procession. The profane notes of the “bosses” rang on the air from early dawn till six at night; and an army of laborers camped regularly every noon on the Strongs’ front lawn under the shade of the big trees,

whose lower branches were perpetually ornamented with a variety of coats and dinner-baskets, while brown papers strewed the grass.

This transition period was not at all enjoyed by the Stronges, who often sighed for the old-time peace and country quiet of Hillside Avenue. Nor did they enjoy having the street improved by a big sewer, which went through the middle of the avenue, throwing a mountain of earth out on each side. To her mother's horror, Amy was discovered, one summer night, in a fresh white frock, walking with some of the other children in the bottom of the sewer ditch, fifteen feet below the surface, the sloping mounts of earth each side rising nearly to the tree branches, looking as if but a breath or jar would send them sliding down on the children far below.

When rescued and asked, "How could you think of doing such a thing as that, Amy?" she replied,—

"I wanted to see how it seemed to be so far down in the earth. I never had a chance before to go *into* the earth. It felt warm down there. I *think* I could feel the heat of the earth's fires striking through. You know, mamma, this earth is all a ball of fire inside, and where we live is only the cooled-off crust."

But this happened after Amy had become acquainted with Kitty and Rob Clover, and Elliot Carman, her new neighbors. These were by no means the only children on the avenue. As the population increased, more and more children came to live on the avenue, until it fairly swarmed with them, of all ages and sizes. Indeed, there were said to be forty-four in all, if you counted from the Barrs' last new baby up to the youngest of the four Trimble boys,

who was thinking of raising a mustache and entering the medical college. There were the three Neales,—Ronald, Jack, and Phyllis,—Amy's little cousins, and a most valuable addition to the street, in her opinion; and Professor Dawson's three, and the four Paxtons, and the Goldschmidts' four, and Victor Dana, and Ben Bruce and Paul Williams, and Willie McGrau, and the Herndons, and the Barr boys, and "many others." No one ever knew exactly how many Barrs there were. The number was supposed to be somewhere about seven, and they were always spoken of collectively as "the Barr boys." It is perhaps unnecessary to say that "a whole Saturday" on Hillside Avenue was apt to be a lively day.

Although Amy still found time to read, draw, and dream, she lived so much more active a life than formerly, that she was now able to attend school. So she appreciated the freedom of Saturday as much as any of the children. Once started at play, no one played harder than Amy. She threw her whole soul into play, as into all she did.

CHAPTER II.

"A WHOLE SATURDAY": THE FORENOON.

A S soon as Amy was dressed, she ran outdoors to confer with Kitty and Rob, who were running up and down their driveway, playing with their dog Duke, an Irish setter, with long, silky, reddish hair,—the best-natured, most friendly dog that ever was. When she came in, she asked, —

“Mamma, may I go down to Dr. Taylor’s right after breakfast, with Kitty and Rob?”

“It is rather a long walk for you,” said her mother.

“Oh, we’re not going to walk; we’re going on our tricycles, and Rob on his bicycle. Rob says Bryant Taylor told him yesterday that he has a little alligator of his own. His aunt sent it to him from Florida. We all want to go down and see it.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Strong, “if there is an alligator in the case, it becomes important that you should go down, I see. You may go, but do not stay over an hour. Dr. Taylor may be finishing his sermon, and not care for the noise of so many children.”

“We shall not make any noise,” said Amy. “We are only going to look at the alligator. It must be delightful to have a private alligator of your own.”

The children started soon after breakfast. When they came to Mrs. Carman’s, Elliot was out in front of the house, trying to attach Comet, his sister’s great

St. Bernard dog, as large as a small cow, to his roller-coaster, by an ingenious arrangement of the family clothes-line.

Elliot somewhat resembled Amy in being, as the only son, who had brought up the rear of a large family of girls, a remarkable child, and much petted. In other respects, he was a great contrast to her, disliking books as much as she loved them. The Carmans were a bookish family. The girls had been fine scholars, and were young ladies of more than ordinary literary taste and ability. They often wondered what unknown ancestor's blood could have cropped out in Elliot, to make him so loathe the very sight of a book. He was a boy of quick observing powers, overflowing with activity, full of mechanical ability, learned in the habits of animals, easily remembering whatever he saw for himself; but merely put a book before him, and he fell into so dense a state of stupidity that it seemed wilful obstinacy. The whole family were sometimes worn out by the struggle to worry Elliot's lessons into his head.

Elliot saw the procession coming down the avenue, and was on the alert at once.

“Hullo, Rob!”

“Hullo!”

“Where are you going?”

“Down to Bryant Taylor's to see his little alligator.”

The word “alligator” was enough for Elliot. He flew into the house, wrung a hasty permission from his mother, and was soon making his feet fly, pushing on his bicycle to overtake the other children, who had already turned the corner into Grand Avenue. A bright-looking little procession it was, as it dashed

merrily on in the October sunshine, the cool, fresh morning air and the vigorous exercise bringing a pink tinge even to Amy's cheeks, and making Kitty's glow like a red, red rose.

Amy, who looked not unlike Alice in Wonderland, had long golden hair, light and waving, which she usually wore flowing over her shoulders, drawn back from her forehead with a round comb, exactly like Alice's. The shining hair flew out on the breeze made by their swift motion, like a web of the sunshine itself. Kitty was a brunette, with large brown eyes, and thick, dark-brown hair, cut short because Kitty had the typhoid fever last summer, but flying out in half-curls all around her head. Kitty was strong and sturdy, and very fond of play. Rob was fond of reading, but Kitty cared little for books. A sweet-tempered, loving, happy, healthy child, full of vigor and spirits, Mrs. Strong might well feel herself fortunate to have secured such a little neighbor and playmate for Amy. The two girls were inseparable. Each seemed to furnish what the other lacked; and they loved each other all the more because they were so different. Rob was a natural, human boy, warm-hearted and quick-tempered.

The children soon turned into Chestnut Street, and brought up at Dr. Taylor's gate. They found Bryant, who was a natural worker, always tremendously in earnest about something, dressed in a little pair of blue overalls, hard at work with a small wheelbarrow, wheeling earth from a pile in the street up a plank into his father's yard, assisted by his rosy-cheeked little brother, Stanley. At least Stanley evidently considered that he was helping.

"Hullo, Bryant!" cried the children, as they bore down upon him. "What are you doing?"

"Filling up mother's flower-beds," said Bryant.

"And I am helping him," said Stanley.

"Can we see your alligator?"

"Why, yes, I can stop a little while, I guess," said Bryant, with all the importance of a real business man. "Come into the house."

"Where do you keep him?" asked Elliot.

"He's up in father's study now, but father does n't want him there very much."

"I should think you would make a pond for him in the back yard," said Kitty. "We'll all help you dig it."

"Oh, yes," said Amy, "would n't that be nice? You might put rocks around it with vines running all over them, and set out little trees and flowers around it, and perhaps you could have a waterfall splashing into the pond, and it would look so wild and tropical to see him in there."

"Pooh!" said Elliot; "much you girls know about alligators. They are used to a hot climate, and they have to be kept in the house where it's warm."

"Of course they do," said Bryant, "in cold weather. That's why my alligator's in father's study. Mother wants me to give him to the Zoo, and perhaps I will, when he gets bigger."

Dr. Taylor, who was, as Mrs. Strong had foreseen, giving the finishing touches to his sermon, was somewhat surprised to be roused from his absorbing work by the invasion of six children, but greeted his little parishioners cordially, nevertheless, and they hastened to the alligator's corner of the study. The alligator,

who was about five inches long, was in a tin cracker-box filled with water, which stood in a larger wooden box. A grand pow-wow of admiration arose from the children over his charms.

Presently Dr. Taylor made this unselfish proposal,—

“Bryant,” he said, “the sun is shining so brightly by the back door, I think you can safely take the alligator down there now, and give him a little fresh air and sunshine. The children can examine him more easily there, too.”

Accordingly, the alligator was taken outdoors, and out of his box upon the grass. Then the boys tried experiments on him, to see how he would act. They poked him with little sticks and stirred him up; and the alligator opened his great jaws until his whole head yawned, snapping angrily about, and lashing his tail furiously.

“What do you think of him, Amy?” asked Mrs. Taylor, amused by the expression of Amy’s face, as she stood, shrinking back, yet fascinated by the strange look of the tropical creature.

“I think he is very interesting, but very disagreeable,” said Amy, anxious to be, at the same time, polite but truthful.

When the children left for home, they secured Bryant’s promise that he would come up to the Clovers’ to play as soon as he had finished his job, for which his mother was to pay him good wages.

Elliot went home feeling that his whole future happiness depended on having a little alligator, and he beset his mother to order one at once from Florida. His mother refused to be enthusiastic about his new pet; his sisters laughed; and Grandma Gaylord was horrified.

"An alligator in this house!" she exclaimed.
"What won't that boy want next?"

"I don't see where you could keep him, Elliot," said his mother.

"In the bath-tub. You could take him out when you wanted to take a bath."

"And let him gambol about the bath-room, I suppose," said Rose. "How fascinating! This is better than your tame crow."

"I do hope, Maria," said Grandma Gaylord, "that for once you will have a little firmness, and not give in, as you usually do, if Elliot teases long and hard enough. If this house is going to be filled with alligators, lizards, crocodiles, crows, and snakes, I can't live in it, that's all."

"I guess one little alligator isn't going to fill this house, grandma," said Elliot.

"Sh, Elliot," said his mother.

It must be confessed that there was often a conflict between Elliot's ideas and plans and his grandmother's. Grandma Gaylord was a large, stately old lady, who had travelled, and indeed lived much abroad, until within the last few years. She liked to have everything about her very nice, not to say perfect. She had taken the greatest interest in the building of Mrs. Carman's new house,—had almost watched the laying of every board, the driving of every nail, to be sure that all was well done and of the best. The house had every modern beauty and convenience. The choicest of natural woods formed its inside finish, and the floors were polished to the last degree.

Grandma's chief object in life now was to keep the

house from being marred. When a "great, tearing boy," to quote Grandma Gaylord, comes dashing into the house on pressing private business of his own, (another boy waiting outdoors, perhaps, while he rushes up to his room, two stairs at a time, to get his knife out of his other trousers' pocket), doors are apt to bang, rugs will go sliding along with a fellow, making scratches on the slippery floor, and heavy shoes jumping down polished stairs sometimes leave dents behind. Considerable skill was often required on Mrs. Carman's part, to preserve the peace, make Elliot reasonably careful, and keep him respectful under what he considered his grandmother's unreasonable criticisms, and at the same time prevent grandma from driving Elliot to desperation by her anxiety for the preservation of the house.

Elliot, much to their joy, had told the other children confidently when they parted,—

"I'm going to have an alligator of my own, right away."

He now came out into the Clovers' yard, looking disappointed.

"Is n't it a shame?" he said,— "I can't have that alligator, after all."

"That's too bad," cried the children. "Why not?"

"Grandma Gaylord sat right down on him."

"Sat down on an alligator!" exclaimed Rob.

The children all laughed, for Grandma Gaylord was a stout lady, and one could well believe that her firm down-sitting would be fatal to almost anything.

"I mean she won't have him in the house," said Elliot; "and she has prejudiced mother against him,

so that's the end of it. But mother says perhaps she will let me have an aquarium. What are you going to play?"

"Keep house, in Kitty's playhouse," said Rob.

"That's no fun," said Elliot. "That's a girls' play."

"Yes, it is fun too," said Rob; "for Kitty's going to bring out her little stove and cook."

The Clover children had a little playhouse in their back yard, about six feet by nine, with a pointed roof, and a little window in the gable. There were shelves across the end opposite the window.

The proposed cooking threw a more favorable light on the game to Elliot, and he consented to enter into it.

"You and Elliot must be the hunters, Rob," said Kitty, "and go and get some game for me to cook."

"I guess Maggie will let me have some potatoes," said Rob.

Rob was well known to be a favorite with Maggie, the Clovers' cook, so no one was surprised when he returned, bringing not only potatoes, but onions, salt, pepper, a teacupful of lard, and a small pitcher of milk. Amy persuaded her mother's Bridget to let her have half a loaf of bread and some sugar; while Ben Bruce and Paul Williams, who had dropped in and been invited to stay and play, went home for eggs. Elliot brought over a generous supply of apples and grapes, just come up from his father's farm, and so, altogether, there were ample materials for a feast.

Kitty's stove was of real iron, with a real stove-pipe; and in it she could make a real fire. As the

playhouse had no chimney, it was found best to mount it on a soap-box just outside the playhouse door. Rob built a fire in it, and soon real smoke was pouring out of the pipe, often in the children's faces, as the wind whisked about.

"I am going to bake some of the potatoes, and fry some," said Kitty.

"Then I will make a delicious potato-stew," said Amy.

Amy liked to make a stew, because you could put so many things into it. It was much more interesting than merely frying potatoes.

"I tell you, boys, what we'll do while the girls are cooking the dinner," said Ben Bruce, who had a mechanical turn of mind. "Let's build an attic in the playhouse."

"Oh, I do wish you would," said Kitty. "I should like one ever so much."

"I don't see how you can do it," said Rob.

"Easy enough," said Ben. "We can rest the boards on the top shelf on one side, and nail some strips under to hold up the other end."

"There's lots of boards down in the stable," said Rob, leading the way to a pile of boards, which perhaps his father had designed for other uses. He also produced the saw, the hammer, and his father's nail-box.

Rob and Paul industriously sawed and cut, under Ben's directions; while Ben and Elliot, as head carpenters, measured and hammered. Nails were not spared; and the little attic, when done, was found very satisfactory by the girls, who were called from their cooking to try it. No stairs were necessary, as

the attic floor was so low down that they only had to reach their elbows up on it, to squirm and wriggle up.

"Dinner is ready now," announced Kitty.

Rob, who was up in the attic, squeezed through the little window, and leaped to the ground.

"See Rob leaping from the burning building," said Paul.

"That's a good idea," said Rob. "After dinner, let's play have a fire."

Every one liked this proposal; but first dinner must be eaten.

"This is potato-soup," said Amy, finding she had put too much milk in the stew. As she, in her anxiety to have it "good," had also put in too much onion, pepper, and salt, and discovering her mistake, had tried to remedy it with sugar, although every one politely tasted the soup, a little seemed to go far.

"Won't you try some of the fried potatoes, Amy?" asked Kitty.

"No, I thank you," said Amy, who had happened to see Duke, attracted by the savory odor, stick his nose into the frying-pan when Kitty's back was turned. Duke, who evidently considered himself one of the children, was always on hand, in the thickest of the fun, whatever it might be.

As the cooks had only one knife outdoors, they had sometimes been obliged to thrust their fingers into the lard cup; and as fingers in and about Cincinnati are apt to become very black, especially when they belong to children who are enjoying a "whole Saturday" outdoors, the lard in the cup had gradually assumed a

dusky hue that made all fried articles distasteful to the fastidious Amy.

But the baked potatoes were an immense success, broken open, salted, and gnawed from the hand. Playing hard in the keen October air had made them very hungry, and all agreed with Elliot when he said, —

“These hot baked potatoes taste the best of anything I ever ate in my life.”

The apples and grapes made a most acceptable dessert, and luckily there were enough for Dixon and Claribel Herndon, Van Gooding and Max Goldschmidt, who, having smelt out the fun from afar, now came scampering down the Clovers’ driveway to the scene of festivities, and were willing to eat even the potato-soup.

The arrival of these reinforcements was fortunate, in view of the proposed conflagration.

“We shall have enough boys now to get up two fire companies,” said Rob. “My roller-coaster will be the Five’s engine, and you go home and get yours, Elliot, for the Six’s.”

“My bicycle can be the hose-cart,” said Van Gooding.

“I’ll be the chief engineer,” said Max, “and go tearing ahead on my safety.”

“I’d like to see you be the chief engineer!” said Rob.

“Why not, I’d like to know?” said Max, warming up.

“Because Ben’s the biggest, and we had it all planned for him to be engineer before you came.”

“Then I’m going home,” said Max.

But here, luckily, Willie McGrau, and Fred and Dick Woodard, and two of the Barr boys rounded the corner of the house. The Clovers' was rather apt to be the rallying-place of the Hillside Avenue children of a Saturday; and when a boy did not know what else to do with himself, he dropped into the Clovers' back yard at a venture, to see what might be on foot there.

"That's lucky," said Rob; "we needed more boys like everything. The companies will be so large now that we can have two chief engineers. Come on, boys. Let's divide up and begin."

The girls entered the doomed house, and scrambled up into the little attic; while the boys, having arranged their companies satisfactorily, and wound the Clovers' hose around Van's bicycle, disappeared around the corner and up the driveway, camping under the *porte-cochère*, now converted into an engine-house.

"We must all go to sleep now," said Kitty; and the girls curled themselves up on the attic floor. The boys also stretched themselves out on the gravel beside their engines, for it was now night, although never had the October sun poured a brighter flood of golden light through the yellow leaves.

An unnatural stillness prevailed; unnatural, that is, in the Clovers' back yard on Saturday. But Duke was not deceived. He knew, well enough, that this was only the lull before the storm, and lay on the grass beside the boys, head and ears up, and mouth wide open, ready to leap at their first movement.

Now the silence was broken by loud screams from the playhouse.

"Fire! Fire! Our house is on fire!"

"Ding, ding! Ding, ding! Ding! Ding! Ding!" shouted Rob. "Corner of Elm and Twelfth! Must be Music Hall!"

Roller-coasters, bicycles, safeties, and boys came racing at breakneck speed down the driveway, making the gravel fly, — the boys shouting, Duke leading the race, barking his loudest; while the girls, their heads out of the attic window, screamed at the top of their voices, really excited by their own noise and make-believe danger. The hose-cart rushed to the fire-plug; and the hose was attached and hauled over the grass in a lively manner by the active firemen.

"Play the stairs are on fire, and you can't get out until we rescue you," shouted Ben.

"All right," cried the girls. "Help! Help! We can't get out! We are smothering!"

Rob had a small ladder that he had made himself.

"To the rescue, men! Save the women!" shouted Max.

Rob's ladder was placed against the playhouse, and the boys swarmed up it, succeeding in hauling the girls out of the attic window upon the roof, the excitement being increased by the giving way of the attic floor just at the crisis, which made it "seem all the more real," Amy said.

The hose, in the hands of Van and Elliot, began to play freely on the burning building. Although the boys did not mean to throw water on the girls, — at least, they said they didn't, — somehow the girls were considerably sprinkled, and their screams were now in good earnest.

"Stop throwing water on us, Elliot Carman!" cried

Kitty. "I'll go right over and tell your mother if you don't."

"I wish you would stop, Van Gooding," said Amy. "My stockings are all wet; and you will spoil our hats."

Dixon dropped off the rear of the playhouse and scrambled for home as fast as his legs could carry him; while his sister Claribel, a little girl of seven, began to cry, and said, —

"Let me get down! I want to go home. I don't want to play this any more."

"Can't help it," said Van, who was a rough boy. "This fire's got to be put out, anyway. Fire! Fire!"

The commotion now drew Mrs. Strong to the window to see the cause of such a noise. She was amazed to see Amy and the other girls on top of the playhouse roof, surrounded by a howling mob of boys, while Van Gooding was throwing a smart stream of water, now on Duke, now on the house, now on the girls and boys.

"Now you stop that, Van Gooding!" Rob was calling.

"Who's going to mind you, Rob Clover, I'd like to know?" said Van, letting a stream of water into Rob's face.

"See here," said Rob, scrambling, dripping, down the ladder, "whose hose is that, anyway? You drop it now, or I'll make you."

"Let's see you make me," said Van.

Rob was a natural fighter, prompt to avenge his injuries. He was good-natured and kind, but it was never safe to impose on him to any marked extent.

He dived for Van, and blows began to fly fast between the angry boys, when Mrs. Strong's window flew up, and she called,—

“Amy, come home this instant.”

Mrs. Clover's window also opened, and her voice was heard above the uproar. At the same time the noon reveille began to sound up and down the avenue. The mothers of Hillside Avenue had various devices for summoning their children when playing away from home. Mrs. Strong rang a large dinner-bell with all the energy of her nature; the Clovers sounded a gong; Mrs. Carman tinkled a silver tea-bell; Mrs. Goldschmidt blew a toy trumpet; Mrs. McGrau and Mrs. Boyd sounded a watchman's whistle; while Mrs. Herndon and Mrs. Stevens usually called their children with a rising and falling accent, like the exercises in the front of the readers,—“Cláribel! Claribèl!” “Oscár! Oscàr!” Mrs. Barr sent whatever boy happened to be around in pursuit of the other boys; and he usually stood in the middle of the avenue and “hollered” until he heard an answering halloo. Nurse Nannie trotted up and down the street, asking every one, “Have you seen Victor?” if, by any chance, she had lost sight of the boy.

A stranger who happened to be on Hillside Avenue at noon or night would naturally have been amazed when all the bells began to ring, the whistles and trumpets to blow; but if a reasonable stranger, he would realize that forty-four children are not to be corralled in their respective folds without some effort.

The children now scattered to their own homes and luncheons.

“I really do not know what to do,” said Mrs.

Strong to her husband. "It is n't the thing for our Amy to be playing with such a lot of rough boys. I do not like it. I wish she and Kitty could play by themselves. But Mrs. Clover naturally wants Rob to play with his sister, and then all Rob's friends drop in to play with him. My choice seems to lie between letting Amy play with the boys when I can't help it, or keeping her shut up in the house."

"The boys on this avenue," said the professor, "are rough, some of them, but they are not bad boys. Amy is naturally so gentle and refined that no amount of playing with boys will make her rough or unlady-like. Her own instincts would repel her from anything wrong; and her health, her very life, depend on plenty of active, outdoor play. Such a morning as this in the fresh air is almost enough to cancel the doctor's bill for a whole quarter."

Amy's dress had been badly torn in the "rescue," and her face and hands were incredibly black; but the dress was a Saturday play-dress, and a little soap and water soon restored her usual fairness of complexion. Her hair was in a terrible tangle, and Mrs. Strong said it must be braided before she went out to play again; but she was so bright and fresh and happy, and had so good an appetite, and chatted away so merrily at luncheon, entertaining her father and mother by funny stories of the morning's adventures, that her mother was almost reconciled to the rough play.

CHAPTER III.

"A WHOLE SATURDAY": THE AFTERNOON.

AFTER luncheon, Amy, who, when she had drawn none for half a day or so, felt like a starving man craving food, fell upon her pencils and drawing-block, and curling up in a big chair in the bright sunshine streaming through the library bay-window, was soon lost in the delights of creative joy. As the story grew in her mind, she drew the scenes and characters, sometimes using colored crayons to enhance the effect.

The quiet world of fancy was doubly fascinating after the morning's noisy play; and she was hardly glad to be aroused by Kitty's hand on her shoulder, and Kitty's soft cheek rubbed against hers, as Kitty's pleasant voice said,—

“What are you drawing, Amy? May I see it?”

“Oh, it's just a story I'm making up, about a princess and a witch and a cruel king and wicked queen. The princess became a martyr in the end. It's a long story, and a good deal mixed up, and I can't tell it all to you now. This I am drawing now is the scene where the wicked queen persuades the king to order the poor martyr executed.”

This was a thrilling scene. The wicked queen was pointing sternly, goading on the executioner, a monster of ugliness, whose huge axe was just raised over

the head of a gentle, lovely creature, labelled in Amy's handwriting, "The Marter." The spectators were weeping bitterly.

When Kitty had sufficiently admired this picture, Amy showed her another of "The Witch Weirdly Chanting."

"Do you see the yellow birds flying around her head," said Amy, "and her black cat?"

"Oh, is that a cat?" asked Kitty. "I thought it was a mouse."

"You see," said Amy, beginning on a new picture, "the witch is at the bottom of all the trouble. It is all her doings."

Kitty had the greatest admiration for Amy's stories and pictures, especially of an evening or a Sunday afternoon; but Saturday there was too much business of importance on hand to waste time on pictures.

"Don't draw any more now," she said. "Come on outdoors and play."

"I am not going to play out any more to-day," said Amy, now wedded to her idols. "Van Gooding is so rough."

"Mother told Van he could n't come over here this afternoon to play, because he threw water on us," said Kitty, "so that's all right. Do come, Amy. Leave your old drawing. You're always drawing or reading or writing, and it's so stupid."

Still Amy drew on, unmoved by Kitty's arguments.

"Ben Bruce said he would bring his tent over after lunch," said Kitty, "and we're going to have such fun, playing camp out down in the hollow."

"Oh, are you?" said Amy, waking up, her imagination struck by the romance of camping out. "Well,

I 'll be over pretty soon, as quick as I finish this story. I 've only one more scene to draw now, — the martyr's ghost haunting her cruel enemies."

Hillside Avenue, as its name implies, ran along the ridge of quite a high hill, having commanded a pleasant view of the surrounding country until the building of so many houses had obstructed the outlook. Most of the houses had stables in the rear, and back of the stables, the hill sloped rapidly down to a hollow, through which a little brook wound under the shade of great elms, that had sprung up along the water-course in the old days when all was wild, unsettled country. Of course the children were fond of playing about the brook ; but since the building of so many houses, there was a suspicion that the poor little brook, through no fault of its own, was little better than an open sewer, and wise mothers tried to keep their children away from it. The brook wound away from the Clovers' high back fence ; and the hollow back of their stable, overhung by the great elms, was an ideal place for camping out, it seemed so wild, so remote, — all trees, bushes, and long dead grass ; not a house to be seen, only the rear of some stables.

When Amy came out, she found Ben's tent already erected in the fence corner down in the hollow, the flag of our country flying proudly on top, and Kitty's cook-stove before its entrance. It looked to Amy like Farny's pictures of wild life on the plains, especially as Ben and Rob were pacing up and down before the tent, with long wooden guns at their shoulders, while Duke followed close at Rob's heels.

Mr. Clover, thinking military drill good for boys, had bought a dozen wooden guns for Rob. Ben

Bruce had some knowledge of military tactics, and he had formed a military company among the boys of the avenue, of which he, as tallest and as knowing the most about drill, was captain, while Rob, though younger and smaller than many of the boys, was, as owner of the guns, unanimously chosen first lieutenant.

"Oh, how nice this is!" exclaimed Amy, as she half ran, half slipped down the steep hillside. "What are you playing?"

"We're camping out on the plains, way out by the Rocky Mountains," said Rob. "The rest of the band are off hunting for game. Captain Bruce and I are guarding the camp and the women and children. There's lots of Indians round, and we may be attacked any minute. Kitty and Claribel are in the tent."

The wild cackling of the McGraus' hens over the fence indicated that the hunters were in that direction; and soon Andy, the McGraus' man, was heard to shout,—

"Here, you young rascals, what are you chasing those hens for? Don't let me catch you, that's all."

Elliot, Paul, Max, and three of the Barr boys came tumbling over the high board fence, followed by chunks of earth, that hit the fence with a "dull thud."

"The Indians are after them!" cried Captain Bruce. "To the rescue!"

There was much loud banging and chasing about, up hill and down, before the enemy were supposed to be repulsed, the women, meantime, arming themselves, and preparing to make a desperate resistance.

Bryant Taylor now appeared, a valuable reinforcement. Amy once said to her mother, —

“I think Bryant will be a minister when he grows up, like his father, he has so much voice.”

Bryant certainly had more voice than his size would have led any one to expect; and as he was always tremendously in earnest in play as well as work, he let it all out. Judging by the volume of noise, Captain Bruce’s forces had been increased at least a third by the timely arrival of Bryant.

“I ’ll be the Indians,” said Bryant. “I ’d just as soon as not. I think I know how they gave the war-whoop. Like this.”

Bryant gave a tremendous whoop, at the same time slapping his mouth with his hand. The effect was admired ; but Ben said, —

“No ; you ’d best be another soldier, to fill out the company. We can make believe the Indians well enough.”

Dixon Herndon was also in camp ; but he did not count much, either with the boys or girls, with neither of whom was he playing, in fact. He was playing with himself, as was his custom, running up and down, scuffling the dead leaves in the hollow with his feet, and switching the bushes and tall grass with a long stick, being something of his own imagination, but no one knew what.

Dixon was about nine years old, an odd child, unlike other boys. His mother wrote books ; and the general feeling on the avenue was that Dixon showed unmistakable symptoms of being a poet, one of these days, or, as Mrs. Kaiser put it, —

“Dixon will be a poet when he grows up, I guess ; he ’ll never be good for anything else.”

Claribel, a sturdy, rosy little girl of seven, as practical as Dixon was dreamy and visionary, was only too happy to figure as Kitty's little girl, and was patiently put to bed and pulled out again at frequent intervals, as the emergencies of the play required. Beds had been made out of boards, with the girls' waterproofs laid over them.

"I wish I had some children," said Amy.

"Perhaps Dixon will be your little boy," suggested Kitty.

"Humph, Dixon!" said Amy. "I couldn't do anything with Dixon. One day, when I wanted him for my child, he would n't be it. He said he was a giraffe, and ran around nibbling the tops of the bushes! Oh, how fortunate! Here come Ronald and Jack and Phyllis!"

"Amy," said Ronald, standing at the top of the hill, "mamma said we could come over and play with you till five o'clock!"

"I'm ever so glad," said Amy. "Wait a minute, and I'll come and help you down the hill."

"Pooh! I don't want any help," said Ronald, proudly. "I'm not a baby. I can come down easy enough."

"So can I," said roguish Jack. "I can roll down."

Jack lay down, and rolled down the steep hill, his pretty gray suit bristling all over with beggar lice, burrs, and dead leaves when he reached the bottom. But Phyllis was glad to wait till Amy had climbed up to her, and, taking her by the hand, tenderly helped her little cousin down to the tent.

Ronald was nine years old, Jack seven, Phyllis five. They were all handsome children of the dark-eyed type; and their mother, Mrs. Neale,— "Cousin

Elizabeth," — a lady of marked artistic taste, always dressed them in a style to enhance their picturesqueness.

"Mrs. Neale's children all look like little Byrons," said Mrs. Clover once.

When they went east in summer to the seashore, artists were sure to fall afoul of them, and insist on sketching and painting them, much to the annoyance of the boys, who felt their picturesqueness a bore. Little Phyllis, who looked like a picture right out of a sweet, old-time story-book, in spite of all the admiration openly lavished upon her by injudicious callers of her mother's, was still as unconscious as a rose blooming on its stem.

"Now you've got so many more children than I, Amy," said Kitty, "I think you might give me one, and then we should be just even. Do let me have Phyllis."

"No, indeed," said Amy. "Phyllis is my little girl, are n't you, Phyllis?"

"Yes," said Phyllis, nodding her curly head decidedly. "I'm Amy's little girl, always." Phyllis was quite used to being quarrelled for by the children, as a most precious possession.

"Then I'll take Ronald," said Kitty, "for Jack won't mind me a bit. You'll be my boy, won't you, Ronald?"

Ronald graciously consented, but when Amy said, — "Now, Jack, you'll be real good, won't you, and do just as I tell you?" Jack only answered, with a roguish twinkle in his black eyes, and a shake of his curly head, like a wild colt, —

"I don't know. Maybe I will."

Here another reinforcement arrived, in the shape of Victor Dana. The older boys now decided that, as they were camping out, the proper thing was to build a fire. Material was plenty on all sides. Rob brought a rake from his stable, and Willie McGrau ran home for another; and as they all worked heartily at this agreeable task, very soon a huge pile of dead leaves and dry brush was collected in the hollow. Rob ran up to the laundry for matches.

"What are you after now?" asked Maggie, from the top of the kitchen stairs.

"Oh, nothing much," said Rob, feeling it was just as well not to mention the matches, with which he scampered down into the hollow.

"He's up to some mischief, I'll be bound," said Maggie to herself.

The leaves and dead branches kindled quickly, crackling fiercely as the fire ran through the heap, making a splendid blaze. Even Dixon was charmed by the fire, and forsaking his own devices, ran about as briskly as the others, gathering all the dead branches that had blown off the elms in last winter's storms, and piling them on the flames, which mounted higher. What might have happened next remains unknown, for about this time Mrs. Strong's vigilant eye detected thick smoke rising from behind the Clovers' stable, and caught a glimpse of the blaze.

Mrs. Strong's favorite horror was the possibility of a fire on Hillside Avenue. The fire service of Edgeton was as yet imperfect; and in case of fire, the inhabitants had to call in the aid of the city engines. The ground was covered with dead leaves, and a brisk wind was blowing. If but one stable caught, it was

probable that the whole side of the avenue would be swept away.

Mrs. Strong knew that Mrs. Clover had gone into the city shopping, and felt that the danger required immediate action. Yet as the boys were neither her boys nor on her premises, some diplomacy was needed. She went over to the brow of the hill, where it was some time before she could make herself heard above the babel. The children might all have been Indians in good earnest, by the grand pow-wow that was going on around the camp-fire.

Mrs. Strong appreciated the picturesqueness of the scene,—the golden October afternoon, the swaying, overhanging elm-boughs still bearing a few yellow leaves, rapidly thinning, as the breeze sent them sailing down into the hollow and over the fence into the brook, the white tent with its bright flag flying in the wind, the high blazing fire, and the children dancing around it. It seemed a pity to spoil so much fun, but it must be.

"Boys," she said, when she had made herself heard at last, "I think that fire very dangerous. With such a wind as this, and so many dead leaves about, it may spread up the hill and get beyond your control any moment. And if a fire is once started on this avenue, where there are so many frame houses, it will be a terrible thing. I want to ask you, boys, to put it out, as a favor to me."

A dead silence fell on the boys. It was hard to put out their splendid fire; but they knew Mrs. Strong was in the right. Presently Rob spoke up cheerfully,—

"All right, Mrs. Strong; we'll put it right out."

"Play it's a real fire, and get our engines and hose to put it out," said Ben.

This proposal delighted the boys. Soon there was such a scampering and shouting, and rattling of roller-coasters and bicycles, and squirting of water, as made Amy, remembering her experiences of the morning, very willing to mind her mother, and come up out of the dangerous hollow, to play on her own grounds.

Bryant threw himself into the play with so much earnestness that his cries of "Fire!" brought Mrs. Goldschmidt to her window in alarm, three houses away.

Amy brought her little cousins home with her; and Kitty and the younger children soon followed, both because they all loved to be where Amy was, and because the older boys had decided to have a military drill.

Amy and her friends first played "Queen." One reason all the children loved to play with Amy was because she invented so many interesting new games.

"I will be Queen Clementina," said Amy. "Phyllis is my daughter, the Princess Rosamond; Kitty is my prime minister, and the rest of you must be my courtiers."

Amy made herself a crown of catalpa-leaves, and mounted the throne,—the seat that Philip had made, high up in the group of ailanthus-trees. Philip had built a wooden cover or canopy over this seat, to protect Amy from the hot summer sun, and had also made a convenient little ladder for her to ascend to her seat. The Princess Rosamond also wore a crown of leaves on her dark curls, and sat in much state on

the throne among the tree branches beside the queen, her mother.

Kitty liked being prime minister, because it was her duty to see that all the queen's commands were obeyed, and to make the courtiers behave themselves. This involved great activity on Kitty's part, as the courtiers were of the liveliest sort, all bent on disobeying the queen; and the whole kingdom was soon in active rebellion.

Kitty chased the flying courtiers up hill and down and over the fence into Mrs. Carman's back lot. Finally, she captured Jack, and brought him back to the feet of the queen in triumph.

"Throw him in the dungeon," said Amy, in a stern voice; then, in her natural tone, "You know, Kitty, the prison is the space between the three ailanthus-trunks, under this seat."

"Now, Jack," said Kitty, "it's a rule of the game that you can't come out, after you're once fairly caught and put in prison. You must stay there."

"All right," said Jack, reaching up to see if he could not tickle Phyllis's ankles. Finding that impossible, he contrived to reach out and push over the ladder, just as Queen Clementina was about to come down to help her prime minister capture the other rebels, thus obliging her to squirm down by the fence in a most unqueenly fashion.

When Amy and Kitty, after a long chase, returned, dragging Dixon and Victor, "in chains," as Amy said, they found the prison empty. The other prisoner had flown!

"Do you know where Jack is, Phyllis?" asked Amy.

"He said I must n't tell," said Phyllis, laughing, and looking very sly.

Here a little squeak was heard from above, and Jack's merry face peeped over the edge of the canopy, on top of which he had managed to climb.

"Now, Jack," said Amy, "that's very wrong. You're obliged to stay in prison."

"I am in it," said Jack; "this is just the same spot, only a little higher up." And he leaned far over and began to tickle Phyllis's neck with the tip of a little switch.

"Amy, please make Jack stop," said Phyllis.

"Dear me!" said Amy, "I don't know what I am going to do with such a troublesome lot of courtiers. I believe I must order them all executed."

But here there was an exciting diversion, in the sudden raid of a foreign enemy into Queen Clementina's domain. Prince, Amy's beloved cat, was peacefully sauntering about. She loved to be outdoors with Amy, feeling herself protected then, and free to pursue unmolested her cattish pleasures of nibbling the grass, lying in wait for birds, rambling and smelling about generally. I say "she" advisedly. Prince had come into the family a tiny kitten, when Amy was only four years old. Amy named her "Prince;" and the name became too fixed to be changed, even after Prince had shown that she was really a princess by presenting Amy with a brood of four fine kittens.

Prince was a beautiful tortoise-shell cat, with a pretty white neck and paws, a soft, knowing, loving little creature, and she was very dear to Amy. The military company, under Captain Bruce, had become tired of their evolutions up and down the Clovers'

driveway, and began to look about for something to vary the exercises. Ben spied Prince sniffing about in the long grass on the Strong's sloping hillside.

"Hallo!" he cried; "there's a ferocious tiger in the jungle. At him, my men! Right about! Fix bayonets! Charge!"

Pointing all their guns at poor little Prince, the whole company bore down on her with terrific yells, Duke joyfully leading the way. Amy screamed, and ran to the rescue; but Prince waited for no one to rescue her. She promptly scrambled up the trunk of a young maple, where she clung among the branches, her hair standing upright, and her tail almost as big as her body.

"Bang! Bang!" cried the boys, pointing their guns at Prince, and pretending to fire a brisk volley.

"For shame!" cried Amy, "to persecute a poor innocent little cat."

"This does n't hurt her any," said Bryant, "because we're only pretending. Bang!"

"Yes, it does hurt her too," said Amy, "because it frightens her so. I wish you'd all go home. This is my kingdom, and I don't want you here."

Here Bridget appeared on the back porch. Bridget was the Strong's cook, who had lived with them many years, and who made their affairs her own. Bridget was well known to rule the rear end of the Strong's dominion with vigor and decision. The boys had had more than one encounter with Bridget, and it was never Bridget that came off worsted.

Prince was Bridget's special care. Though she might sometimes, as she herself said, give Prince "a lick with the rough side of her tongue," she suffered no one else to wrong her.

"Now, boys," said Bridget, "don't you dare lay a hand on that cat. Get right out of here, or it will be the worse for you."

When this powerful reinforcement arrived, the enemy saw that retreat was in order.

"I say, boys, there's Fred and Dick Woodard coming down the street," cried Ben. "Let's make 'em prisoners of war. Forward, march! Charge!" And with loud whoops, the military company charged out into the street, where a lively skirmish took place.

The Woodards were active boys, well able to hold their own in a scrimmage; and they were promptly reinforced by Van Gooding and two of the Barr boys, who, spying the battle from afar, came rushing up, eager for the fray. There was much whooping and halloing, and a great cloud of dust kicked up, obscuring the result of the conflict. Professor Evarts' windows commanded the scene of action. Professor Evarts had no children of his own, and had lately moved to Hillside Avenue, partly to be near his brother professors, and partly because it was such a retired, quiet spot, favorable to study and meditation. This afternoon he was hard at work on a University lecture. Although a most kind and pleasant gentleman, even he groaned in spirit, and wondered people did not "try to restrain their children a little."

When peace had been restored in the queen's dominion, a wail was heard from the throne.

"I can't get down, Amy," cried little Phyllis. "The boys have carried the ladder away."

Sure enough, as often happens, while the queen was busy repelling invaders, her own subjects had improved the opportunity for mischief. The little

boys had stolen the ladder, and made off with it, no one knew where.

"Don't cry, Phyllis," said Amy. "We will try to get you down somehow."

"I'll hunt for the boys, and get the ladder back," said Kitty.

"Oh, good!" said Amy; "here comes Mr. Green."

A very tall, large colored man, almost a giant in size, was coming down the Strong's driveway, with a train of three small dogs at his heels. Mr. Green was so big and black and strong that a stranger, meeting him in his rough working-clothes, might have been afraid of him as a dangerous character. Such stranger would have been surprised to see some tender little tot come running out to him, seize him by the hand, and insist on tagging him off. He was formerly a slave in Kentucky, but when freed by the war, came to Cincinnati. He lived in rooms over the Boyds' stable, and not only earned a comfortable living, but laid up money in the Building Association, by doing all the odd jobs on Hillside Avenue. He was very ingenious, and knew how to do a little of everything. People could not have lived on Hillside Avenue without Mr. Green. Mrs. Strong once made her husband laugh by declaring,—

"Mr. Green is the breath of my nostrils."

Mr. Green loved children, and always had some joke with them as he passed by. Dogs simply clung to him. He only owned two of his own, but the dogs of the most aristocratic families on the avenue deserted their own homes to follow Mr. Green. In house-cleaning time, when Mr. Green was by far the most important man on the avenue, if Mrs. Strong

wanted him in a hurry, she always went out and scanned the avenue up and down, until she saw the train of dogs patiently lying before some one's door, — a sure sign that Mr. Green was within. When he was mowing lawns or making flower-beds, he was sure to be assisted not only by his dogs, but by several small children, whose meddling and bothering he bore most patiently.

Amy felt that their troubles were all over now.

"What's the matter, Rabbit?" asked Mr. Green. It was one of his jokes, when Amy was little, to call her "Rabbit," and he still kept it up occasionally.

Amy told her troubles; and she and Kitty skipped joyfully down to the seat, sure that deliverance had come. Mr. Green was so tall and strong that he easily reached up into the tree, and taking Phyllis in his strong hands, jumped her way out into the air with a big swing that landed her on the ground laughing, with the tears still wet on her cheeks.

"Light as a feather!" said Mr. Green. "Now where's them boys at? 'Pears to me like I'd better straighten the kinks out o' them."

The boys were now seen peering from behind the stable; and Mr. Green gave chase, catching Victor, who kicked and laughed and fought until Mr. Green was glad to let him go, saying,—

"You're a slippery young 'un."

Nurse Nannie was now seen toiling up the Strong's back steps.

"Nannie," said Victor, "I wish you would n't always be following me everywhere."

"Indeed, Master Victor," replied Nannie, "I'm only coming to call on Bridget."

"Oh, you need n't pretend," said Victor. "I know you've just come to watch me."

Which was indeed true, for although Victor was a strong, manly boy of nine, poor old Nannie, who idolized him, never felt safe if he were out of her sight, and greatly annoyed Victor by following him about, to watch over him.

It was now five o'clock, and the little cousins had to go home; and Amy, who began to realize that she was tired, gladly went into the house, to have a quiet hour before dinner in that delightful, old-fashioned land of "Pride and Prejudice," where lived her friends, Elizabeth and Jane and the much-admired Mr. Collins. After finishing the book in the evening, she drew scenes from it. No one would believe how proud Mr. Darcy looked in these sketches, or how lovely were Elizabeth and Jane.

CHAPTER IV.

CLUBS.

THE next day being Sunday, Amy and the Clover children walked up to Sunday-school together as usual, bearing branches of bright autumn leaves, because the superintendent always wanted the Sunday-school room brightened with something of the flower kind. They all stayed to church, Amy made happy by having Kitty sit in her pew. After dinner Amy settled down to a solid feast of reading, Charles Kingsley's "Water Babies" being the book in hand now.

The Strongs and Clovers were agreed in liking a quiet, old-fashioned Sunday ; and their children were expected to suspend noisy play, and amuse themselves in quiet ways that would not disturb the peace of the day. Some children on the avenue were allowed to play as noisily as usual on Sunday ; but not the Clovers and Amy.

Late in the afternoon, Mrs. Strong roused from her own book to the consciousness that Amy had been reading too long.

"Amy," she said, "you must stop reading, or you will have one of your bad headaches to-morrow."

Amy came to, as it were, from her deep absorption in her book, and asked, as she reluctantly laid it down,—

"May I get Kitty and take a walk up and down the avenue?"

"Yes; I have no objection," said her mother, "if you simply walk quietly up and down."

Rob decided to walk up and down with the girls, and of course Duke had to go too, if Rob did. So the little group sauntered along under the arches of the elms, through which the sun, low down in the western sky, shone with a solemn, lingering light; Amy and Kitty with their arms twined around each other's waists, the head with the floating golden hair and the brown curly head close together,—for the girls were talking over great plans,—while Rob and Duke meandered deviously along behind, with many stoppings by the way to examine objects of interest.

Once Duke chased Mrs. Kaiser's cat up a tree. Rob could n't help it if it was Sunday, and if it was Mrs. Kaiser's cat.

"Dogs don't know the difference," he thought. But he found it hard to explain the matter to Mrs. Kaiser's full satisfaction, and she scolded him as if he were to blame.

Mrs. Kaiser had no children of her own, and she seemed to look upon all boys as natural pirates and buccaneers, born chiefly to torment her. If a boy as much as set his foot on her lawn, she flew at him at once, sure that he was bent on mischief.

Amy took this opportunity to unfold to Kitty an important new scheme. Amy was always full of large plans and schemes. She had so many ideas that she could hardly keep up with them, and was so apt to be struck with some new one before finishing the work begun under the last bright thought, that her mother called her the "Great Unfinisher."

"Kitty," she said, "don't you think it would be lovely for us children to have a club of our own?"

"What kind of a club?" asked Kitty.

"Oh, just a club, you know. I heard Mrs. Herndon telling mother yesterday that before Ned died, he had planned getting up a Brightside Club among the children on this street. I don't know exactly what it is, though I have an idea; but it sounds very nice, don't you think so?"

"Yes, indeed," said Kitty. "Let's go into Mrs. Herndon's now and ask her about it."

When the two girls were ushered in, Mrs. Herndon was sitting in the Sunday twilight, thinking of her bright, black-eyed Ned, so full of bounding life, of brightness and promise, who, the previous winter, had vanished from her sight into the eternal silence. She entered into the girls' plan with interest. She told them that the Brightside Club had been a family affair. She and her younger sisters had started it among themselves in the days when high aspirations and limited means brought some trials hard to bear.

"When things were particularly dark and trying, Sister Nell would say, in her brave, cheery way, 'A good time for a meeting of the Brightside Club, girls;' and the Brightside Club helped tide us over many hard times. After Nellie married and moved out to Montana, her children and mine made us a club of just ten. So we worked into it something of the 'ten times one is ten' spirit. It was a plan that dear Ned had much at heart, to start a Brightside Club among those children on the avenue with whom he was the most intimate; and it will be very pleasant for me to help you if I can, because I shall feel that I am doing something for Ned."

Amy and Kitty talked it all over with Mrs. Hерndon, and, after getting Mrs. Strong's consent, lost no time in going, then and there, to invite the proposed members to meet the following Monday evening in the Strong's dining-room, to organize. All the children were enthusiastic about the new club.

When Amy came home, full of the new club, Professor Strong laughed.

"A chip of the old block," was all the explanation that Mrs. Strong, who was suspicious of his merriment, could get out of him.

In truth, Mrs. Strong was a woman of her period, president of two clubs, secretary of another, and member of two more, so perhaps it was no wonder that Amy should take instinctively to clubs.

There had been a great discussion between Amy and Kitty as to who the ten members should be.

"Don't let's have any boys in it," said Amy. "They won't obey the rules, or do as we say, and that will spoil all our fun."

"But I want Rob to belong," said loyal Kitty, "or else I won't."

"Oh, of course we'll have Rob," said Amy. "And mother will want me to ask Elliot Carman, I know. Then we want Laura Dawson."

"Of course," said Kitty. "We want her the first one."

Laura was the only girl of their age on the avenue; but the girls did not see nearly as much of her as they wanted, because she lived some distance away, at the other end of the avenue, and had younger brothers and sisters who absorbed most of her time out of school. She, having been found a congenial

spirit by Amy, had sometime ago been admitted to Our Land, as one of its princesses.

Mrs. Herndon had said she wanted Dixon and Claribel to belong to the club.

"If we have any children of that age," said Amy, "I want Ronald; and Ronald will want his great friend, Victor."

"You might as well ask Nannie to join too, then," said Kitty, laughing.

"Oh, Nannie will come anyway, without being asked, if Victor does," said Amy.

Victor Dana lived in the next house to Ronald, and was the same age. His beautiful young mother had died when Victor was a baby. His father's sister, Miss Grace Dana, kept house and cared for Victor; that is, as much as Nannie would let her. Nannie had been his mother's nurse in infancy, and had lived ever since in different branches of the family. When Victor was born, Nannie had been passed over to Mrs. Dana as a matter of course.

When Mrs. Dana died, Nannie mourned for her as for her own child, and she loved Victor with a double love, for himself and his mother too. She was now very old, and all she had to care for was Victor. He was the object of her constant anxiety, and she never took her eyes off him, if she could help it.

Victor was a strong, handsome, courageous boy, with fair complexion, curly yellow locks, flashing blue eyes, full of daring and spirit; and while he loved Nannie, her devotion was often most annoying to him. He ruled her with a rod of iron, making her do exactly as he wished. Mr. Dana and his Aunt Grace realized that Nannie's devotion was not always

good for the boy ; but it was a difficult problem to withdraw him from under her wing without breaking her heart.

"How many have we decided on now ?" asked Kitty. " You name them, and I will keep count on my fingers."

" You and I," said Amy, " and Rob, Laura, Elliot, Dixon, Claribel, Ronald, and Victor."

" Nine already," said Kitty. " And we want Ben Bruce, of course."

" Of course," echoed Amy, for Ben, big, good-natured, and good-looking, was popular with all the girls.

" Then that makes our ten," said Kitty ; " and we can't have Paul, or any of the other big boys."

" I know it," said Amy. " We can have only ten ; but they might start a club of their own."

The new club met promptly to the minute Monday evening, in the Strong's dining room. Mrs. Herndon also came to help them organize. The first difficulty arising was that all wanted to be officers. There was a great hubbub of voices, all talking together ; and Ronald and Victor took advantage of the confusion to slip under the table and pinch the legs of the unsuspecting Dixon, who, having fallen foul of a book, was lost to the noise around him.

Mrs. Herndon finally succeeded in calling the meeting to something like order, and said, —

" My dear children, it is clearly impossible for you *all* to be officers. Even if there were enough officers to go around, there would be no club left for the officers to govern. The best plan will be to choose

new officers every month. This will not only give each one a turn, but you will have the fun of balloting."

This plan striking the children favorably, Mrs. Strong produced slips of paper and pencils, and the balloting went on spiritedly, with this result: for President, Ben Bruce; Secretary, Kitty Clover; Clerk, Amy Strong; Treasurer, Laura Dawson; Marshal, Rob Clover. Kitty, who attended the public school, wrote a beautiful round hand, as plain as print, so she was chosen secretary; but Amy was known to be so powerful in composition, that it was felt best to secure her talent for the club as clerk. The secretary was to keep the minutes, the clerk write any letters that might be necessary.

Ben suggested the office of marshal, partly as a joke, partly because it was plain that Rob felt slighted because he had been elected to no office. Rob's face brightened at once.

"But what am I expected to do?" he asked.

"Why, carry out the President's orders; keep order," said Ben.

"All right. I'll make 'em behave," said Rob. "You fellows had better look out now. A marshal can arrest you, you know."

"Pooh!" cried the small boys, "we're not afraid of you, Rob Clover."

And they immediately began prancing around the room, to defy the new marshal, whose appointment threatened to promote disorder rather than order; but when Mrs. Herndon told them that they could not expect to belong to the club unless they obeyed its rules, they quickly subsided in their chairs. Quiet

being once more restored, Mrs. Herndon explained the object of the new club.

"It is all contained in the name," she said. "The Brightside Club are to look on the bright side themselves, and try to help give a bright side to other people's lives, too, whenever they have an opportunity. You will be surprised, by the way, to find how many such opportunities you will find when you are on the look-out for them. The club's aim might be expressed in this saying, which I noticed in Dixon's last Sunday-school paper,—

"'Do all the good you can, to all the people you can, in all the ways you can, as long as you can.'

"You all understand what that means, I am sure. You might meet every fortnight during the winter. I will give you a simple order of service to open the meetings. You might each read or recite a short story or poem that has a 'Brightside' meaning. Then it would be pleasant if you would all keep your eyes open during the week; and if you happen to see some one do a kind deed that brightens some one else's life a little, remember it, and tell it at the next meeting."

"I should like that," said Amy. "Real stories are so much more interesting than made-up ones."

"We shall all enjoy that," said Laura.

So this was the general programme agreed on for the meetings. Mrs. Herndon gave them the Brightside mottoes which she wished them to learn, ready to repeat in concert at the next meeting. When the club met, the President was to call them to order, and then they were to begin the meeting by standing and reciting together,—

OUR MOTTO.

Look up and not down ;
Look forward and not back ;
Look out and not in ;
Lend a hand.

OUR TEXT.

And they helped every man his brother, and each one said to his neighbor, Be of good courage.

OUR RULES.

Look on the bright side.
Count up your blessings.
Do cheerfully the duty that lies nearest.
Reach out and touch other lives to brightness.

The meeting then adjourned, to meet a week from Friday evening at Laura Dawson's, Friday evening having been decided on, as there was no school the next day, and consequently no lessons to be prepared.

After the meeting had adjourned, Mrs. Strong said, "As this is not a regular meeting of the club, I suppose I shall not be violating any rule if I offer refreshments," and passed some nuts and bananas.

If this were a violation of the rules of the club, the club winked at it cheerfully, and made up for any previous enforced quiet by much merry chat and laughter, and many merry jokes, as they picked their nuts.

Nannie, pretending to have misunderstood the hour, had arrived early in the evening, much to Victor's disgust. When she was putting on his overcoat to go home, he said, —

"Nannie, you know you came early on purpose to watch me, as if I were a great baby. You need n't pretend. You know you did."

"Ah, Master Victor, you should n't speak so to your old Nannie. Let me tie your throat up good, for it's a cold night out. Now go and bid Mrs. Strong and Miss Amy good-night, and say you've had a very pleasant time, like a little gentleman."

Of course the organization of the new club made a great sensation among the children on the street, especially the big boys who were not in it. Mrs. Herndon suggested that they organize a club of their own.

"There is no limit to Brightside clubs, boys," she said. "The more the merrier."

The boys acted on this advice. Mrs. Herndon helped them organize, as she had the others. This club was composed wholly of boys, all the older girls on the avenue belonging to the first club. But Fred Woodard, who was president of what Brightsiders Number One called "The Other Club," proudly said to Ben Bruce,—

"A great club yours is! A lot of girls and babies! Now, we've got a club that *is* a club, and no mistake."

Ben, who knew that the other boys would gladly have had Amy, Kitty, and Laura in their club, wisely declined to pick up the defiance Fred had thrown down to him, and only said,—

"Let those brag that win. We'll see by-and-by who has the best club."

CHAPTER V.

A BRIGHTSIDE MEETING.

THE members of the Brightside Club met promptly at Laura's on the appointed evening, full of enthusiasm. After repeating the motto, text, and rules in concert, they sang an opening song, written for them by Mrs. Herndon, set to the air of "Fair Harvard."

Not only Mrs. Herndon, but also Mrs. Strong and Mrs. Neale,—"Cousin Elizabeth," as Amy called her,—were present this first evening to see that all ran smoothly.

Cousin Elizabeth might have been the original of Jean Ingelow's poem,—

"The sweetest woman ere drew breath
Was my son's wife, Elizabeth."

She was so full of loving-kindness that she was a whole Brightside Club in herself,—loving-kindness with plenty of wit and sparkle in it, too.

"Is n't Cousin Elizabeth kind?" was a standing remark of Amy.

After the opening exercises, Ben, prompted by Mrs. Herndon, who sat by his side, and made whispered suggestions now and then, said,—

"We agreed that we would each read or recite a Brightside story or poem, or tell something we had

seen. I will go right around the table in turn. Kitty, you come first."

"Mamma told me this," said Kitty. "Our washerwoman's brother has been having dreadful trouble with his eyes, so that he could n't work; and he was so poor that people had to help him, or his family would have starved. He felt that he could n't afford to go to a doctor to have his eyes treated, and he did n't know what to do. And only think, was n't it nice and kind, young Dr. Trimble on this street,—you know he is just beginning as an oculist,—heard about it, and offered to treat the poor man for nothing, if he would come to him; and now his eyes are perfectly well, and he has gone to work. That was brightening some one's life in earnest."

"What is your story, Laura?" asked Ben.

"Mine is a true story too," said Laura; "but it did n't happen here. It happened in Massachusetts. A few years ago, there was a dreadful accident on the Hoosac Railroad. Going around a curve, on the edge of a steep embankment two hundred feet above the Deerfield River, the track, weakened by rains, gave way, and an express train ran off. The engine and tender and one or two cars went down this steep bank. The fireman had jumped off, and was only slightly hurt. Looking down the bank, he saw the engineer pinned under the heavy engine, with the hot steam pouring out on him. The fireman ran down to see if he could release him, but the engineer said,—

"'Never mind me, Jim; I'm done for. Flag the track.'

"He knew there was another train due soon, and

though he was dying in such agony, he forgot himself in trying to save others."

Tears stood in Laura's eyes when she finished, and in some other eyes too.

"Rob, it's your turn now," said Ben.

"I didn't find anything very Brightside-ish," said Rob, "and so I am going to say the piece I spoke at school to-day. My teacher said it was a good poem, and she wanted all the scholars to remember it. She said it was a German poem.

"' He who is rich
Can drive with a span ;
He who is poor
Must go as he can.

"' Better honest and poor,
And go as you can,
Than rich and a rogue,
And drive with a span.'"

The children clapped Rob's verses, and Mrs. Neale said, —

"Your teacher was right, Rob; that is a good poem for boys, or indeed any one to remember."

Amy's turn came next. She said, —

"My story is only a little thing, — something that I saw last Saturday, as mamma and I were coming out from the city. A very pretty lady got into the car with us, at the post-office, carrying a beautiful bunch of yellow chrysanthemums, the largest I ever saw. They were like great golden balls. There was no one in the car at first except us; but at the corner of Broadway and Court Street, a little girl came in with a market-basket. It was so heavy it bent her all

over. She did not look more than ten years old, and she was poorly dressed; but the saddest thing was her face. It looked so old and sober, almost wrinkled, like an old woman's. She didn't look as if she had ever laughed, or played, or had a good time in her life. I felt so sorry for her.

"The lady with the flowers kept looking at her. By-and-by she slipped along on the seat, and took some chrysanthemums out of her bunch, and said to the little girl, with a sweet smile, —

"Would n't you like some flowers?"

"You ought to have seen how the little girl's face changed! It smiled all over, and the tired, worried look went out of it, and she said joyfully, —

"Oh, yes, thank you, ma'am."

"Then she sat looking at the flowers in her hand, as if she could n't believe her eyes. They were like little suns, they brightened her face so. Once in a while she would smile at the lady, and then the lady would smile back again. She got out of the car on the hill, but her basket did n't seem nearly as heavy as before, and she walked off up the street quite quickly, looking at her flowers all the time."

"Amy said her story was only a little thing," said Mrs. Strong; "but it's the little things, after all, that make life happy or wretched. Big things only come once in a while, but the little things are happening all the time."

It was now Elliot's turn, but he said, —

"I don't know any Brightside story."

"Why, Elliot," said Amy, "I can tell you one that happened right at your house. Don't you remember last week, when we were playing at your house, old

Mrs. Wigsley came to call on your mother, and she was out, and how kind and polite your sister Rose was to her? She made Mrs. Wigsley come in and sit down and warm and rest herself nicely, and talked to her pleasantly; and when she went away, your sister insisted on helping her down the steps, because Mrs. Wigsley is so lame."

"Oh, that is n't anything," said Elliot. "Rose is always doing such things as that."

"True, that was only one of the little things, Elliot," said Mrs. Herndon; "but don't you suppose it helped give a brighter side to old Mrs. Wigsley's life?"

"Why, yes, I guess it did," said Elliot, remembering now how pleased and satisfied Mrs. Wigsley had looked, as she hobbled down the steps, leaning on his pretty sister's arm.

Little Claribel repeated Lucy Larcom's "Three Saws," —

"If the world seems cold to you,
Kindle fires to warm it;
Let their comfort hide from view
Winters that deform it.
Hearts as frozen as your own
To that radiance gather;
You will soon forget to moan
'Ah, the cheerless weather!'"

Ronald said; —

"This is a story that mamma gave me to tell. It is about an old colored man that lived in Cincinnati for a long time. Mamma said that she had not seen him lately, so she supposed he must be dead. He could whistle so beautifully that he was called 'Whistling Charlie.' He was very old; his hair and

whiskers were white, and he was all bent over. He pushed a hand-cart around the streets to earn his living. He used to go along the middle of the street, pushing his cart, never looking to the right or left, but whistling so beautifully that every one would stop to listen, and say, ‘There goes Whistling Charlie.’ Mamma said — what was it you said, mamma ?”

“Ronald forgets the Brightside part of his story,” said Mrs. Neale, laughing. “I said there was always something touching to me in his music: the poor old man, bent and gray, pushing his heavy cart through the crowded street, while high above all the din and noise soared his musical notes, with trills and runs like a mocking-bird’s, — really beautiful. It sounded cheerful and inspiring, as if to remind us that there was something besides hard work and trouble in the world. Even out of his poor life, Whistling Charlie was able to brighten other lives.”

“I remember old Whistling Charlie well,” said Mrs. Strong. “I always had the same impression you speak of from his music.”

It now being Dixon’s turn, he looked up wisely, and said, in his old fashion, —

“I think I will tell something that I saw in the newspaper last winter. That cold spell when the mercury went very low, and the weather was so cold, and the snow so deep, a lady over in East Oak Grove used to have hot coffee made every day, and give hot coffee and sandwiches to the car conductors and gripmen when they went past her house. I guess those men thought she made a bright side to their lives.”

"I guess so too, Dixon," said his mother.

Victor now repeated some verses by Susan Coolidge that his Aunt Grace had taught him :—

"One little star in the starry night,
One little beam in the noonday light,
One little drop in the river's might,—
What can it be? Oh, what can it do?

"Each little star has its special ray;
Each little beam has its place in the day;
Each little river-drop impulse and way;
Feather and flower and songlet help too.

"Each little child can some love-work find,
Each little hand and each little mind;
All can be gentle and useful and kind,
Though they are little, like me and like you."

"The little poems fit in nicely to our talk," said Mrs. Herndon.

It was now Ben's turn.

"Perhaps you all know my story," he said. "It is about John King, the Cincinnati newsboy, who gave twenty-seven hundred books to the Public Library. He was a farmer's son, up in Michigan. By accident, he lost the use of first one leg and then the other, so that he was bedridden for five years. His only comfort was to read. He read every book he could get hold of, but there were few books of any kind in his neighborhood. He resolved that, if he possibly could, he would have a big library of his own some day. It was eight years before he was able to work at all. Then he came hobbling to Cin-

cinnati on crutches, and found work in a tobacco factory; but in about two weeks he was taken down with small-pox, and had to stay in the pest-house six months."

"I should think he would have been discouraged," said Laura, "with so much bad luck."

"He was," said Ben. "He felt then as if he did not care about living any longer, his life was so hard, and the outlook so dark for him. After a while he was able to return to the tobacco factory; but being crippled in both legs, he could hardly live on what he was able to earn, so he decided to try selling newspapers for a living. Now he did better; he earned about a dollar a day. He not only lived out of this, but saved some money. He kept buying good books all the time, too, and saving them for a time when he should be able to sit down and 'have a big read,' as he said. He became secretary of the Newsboys' Union, and did much to help the newsboys.

"His troubles were not all over yet. He had fifty dollars saved, when a man persuaded him to invest it in a machine for making brooms. The firm soon failed; and John King not only lost all his fifty dollars, but was left one hundred and fifty dollars in debt, and he paid off every cent of that debt before he bought another book."

"Three cheers for John King!" cried Rob, and they were given with a will.

"Afterward he lost all his savings again, by the failure of a banking firm."

"I think he had more than his share of troubles," said Amy.

"But notice, Amy," said her mother, "that he

did n't sit down and whine over them, and consider himself abused. He 'tried, tried again,' bravely."

"He began to see, though," said Ben, "that the time for his 'big read' was not coming very soon. Then there was a great fire in the city, which frightened him for the safety of his books, which were stowed in boxes and trunks in his room in an old wooden tenement-house. So he resolved to give them all to the Public Library, where they would be safe and well cared for. There were, as I said before, twenty-seven hundred of them."

"Valuable books, too," said Mrs. Herndon. "It was said at the time to be an excellent collection."

The children all expressed their admiration for John King; and Kitty asked, "Is he living now?"

"No," said Ben. "He was found dead in his room. He died Feb. 24, 1886. The only furniture in his room was an old bed and bureau, an old safe and stove; but there were two thousand books in the room, arranged on shelves put up all around it. He was given employment in the Public Library the last of his life, which must have just suited him."

"When he gave the books to the Public Library," said Mrs. Neale, "there were articles about him in the papers all over the country. 'Harper's Weekly' had his picture, and a long article comparing him to Elihu Burritt, the learned blacksmith. A gentleman in New York, Dr. Hinton, admired his character so greatly that he wrote to the editor of the 'Commercial,' offering to send on a check of twenty-five dollars toward a sum to be put at interest for King's benefit. King said he was very grateful to Dr. Hinton for his kind interest, but he did not need the money, and did

not feel like accepting help from any one. If, however, Dr. Hinton were willing, he should be glad to pay the check to the Children's Home. Dr. Hinton, in reply, wrote,—

“‘John King is certainly made of true metal. He has enough of the leaven of manliness for a whole city.’ He cheerfully sent the check to King, to be given in his own name to the Children's Home.”

“Now comes my contribution,” said Mrs. Strong. “Ben told Amy what his story was to be about, and that reminded me that I had a letter from John King which it would perhaps interest you children to see. I will first read it aloud, and then pass it around for you to see. The letter will explain itself. It has the true Brightside spirit, you will notice.”

The letter was as follows:—

CINCINNATI, Aug. 12, 1879.

DEAR MADAM,—I received from you a copy of the “Christian Register” of Boston, containing marked article, which I have read, and for which I am much obliged to you.

I am glad to know that I have lived to some little purpose for others, even if life has been but little better than a burden to myself.

I might do a little moralizing, but don't care to run the risk of being tiresome.

Again thanking you for your kindness, I am,
Very respectfully yours,

JOHN KING, *Newsboy*,
46 East Third Street.

Seeing the letter in John King's own handwriting, made him seem very real to the children.

"What a remarkable character he was!" said Mrs. Herndon. "He ought never to be forgotten."

"If every one did as much for others in proportion to their means and opportunities," said Mrs. Dawson, "as John King did, this world would be a different place. We should indeed, as Claribel's verse said, 'kindle fires to warm it.'"

It being now time to adjourn, the club broke up. But Laura found time to tell Amy and Kitty an exciting bit of news, as they were putting on their cloaks.

"Oh, girls," she said, "what do you think? We're going to have some new neighbors in the McDuffy house!"

As most of the houses on the avenue were occupied by their owners, there were few changes, so this was most interesting.

"Who are they?" asked Kitty.

"I do hope they will have some girls," said Amy; "we need more girls on this street so much."

"I don't know anything about them," said Laura, "only Mr. McDuffy told father yesterday that he had had the good luck to rent his house to a very nice family."

"I can tell you all about it, Miss Laura," said Nannie, who had come for Victor as usual. "The gentleman came to our house to-day for the key, and Miss Grace had quite a talk with him. He is a captain in the navy, Captain Brownell."

"A captain in the navy!" exclaimed the girls.

"Yes. He is to have charge of all the lights on the Ohio River and branches, between Pittsburg and Cairo."

"How interesting!" said the girls.

"But do you know, Nannie, if he has any children?"

"There are some young ladies in the family, because he spoke of them to Miss Grace," said Nannie, "but that is all I know about it. They move in next Monday."

"Then I shall watch to see if there are any children," said Amy.

The children now came out into the bright moonlight. Faithful Duke, who had followed Rob and Kitty to the club, and had been sitting patiently on the Dawsons' front porch ever since, waiting for them, welcomed them with glad barks and much leaping about, and joyfully helped the club escort each other home. The club had now evidently laid aside its dignity, and there was a merry sound of children's voices and laughter mingled with many loud "bow-wows" on the evening air, and much scampering of the company up and down the avenue, with cheerful "Good-night, Amy," "Good-night, Kitty and Rob," "Good-night, every one," as they parted.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEW NEIGHBOR.

A MY was so deeply interested in the new neighbors that she even wanted to stay at home from school Monday.

"I have all my books at home," she pleaded in a feeble tone, "and my head aches."

"Too much reading yesterday," said her mother. "I am surprised that you should want to stay at home from school; I thought you were so fond of your school."

"So I am," said Amy. "I love it. But I thought one day would not make any difference if I studied my lessons at home; and the new neighbors might come while I was away."

"Oh, that's the trouble, is it?" said Mrs. Strong. "But you must go to school, Amy. Marguerite would be greatly disappointed if you were not there. Wasn't it to-day that she wanted you to go home to lunch with her?"

"Why, so it was! I had almost forgotten about it. Then I must go, of course," said Amy, cheerfully, her aching head seeming suddenly better. "But please be sure to watch, mamma, and see how many children the Brownells have."

As Amy passed by, she looked with much interest at the McDuffy house. The front door stood open, and a colored man was cleaning the windows and

porch. The prettiest little Scotch terrier Amy had ever seen, with silky yellow hair hanging over his bright black eyes; and a blue ribbon tied in a jaunty bow on his collar, ran out and barked smartly at Amy's heels, turning back, wagging his little tail with a proud, self-satisfied air, like one who has done his whole duty, when the man called, —

"Here, Nixie, Nixie, come here, sir! What are you about?"

"What a pretty dog!" thought Amy. "That must be their dog. I am sure they must have some children. But I must hurry, or I shall miss the omnibus."

Miss Nutting's omnibus, which went over to Hilltop every morning to collect the pupils from that lovely suburb, stopped at the Grand Avenue drug-store mornings for Amy. Hardly was she in the drug-store before she heard the toot of the driver's horn, which always embarrassed her, it seemed to make her such a conspicuous object of public interest in the neighborhood. She ran out, and hastily climbed in, being received with friendly "good-mornings" by those great persons to whom Amy and her friends looked up with much respect, — the seniors, several of whom came from Hilltop; girls who had reached the venerable age of seventeen, some of them.

The omnibus jolted and banged along to Oak Grove, the suburb where Miss Nutting's school was situated. As Amy entered the school building, she found a group of girls gathered around their idol, Mademoiselle de Caron, a bright and pretty young Frenchwoman. Amy's cousin, Marguerite Strong, ran to meet her.

"I am so glad you have come," she said. "Oh, Amy, there is great news: Miss Nutting is going to give a historical party, and we are all to go in character! You are to be a Saxon slave, on account of your long light hair, and I am to be Lady Jane Grey. Won't it be delightful?"

"Lovely!" said Amy. "I love to act. But perhaps I shall be afraid before so many people."

"*Vous êtes forte timide, je pense,*" said Mademoiselle, smiling pleasantly at Amy. Amy laughed, and agreed with Marguerite, when she whispered,—

"Is n't Mademoiselle perfectly sweet?"

Marguerite and Amy sat together, much to their happiness. They sat in Miss Nutting's own room, a much-prized privilege.

"It is so interesting to see Miss Nutting manage the girls," Amy had confided to her mother.

Miss Nutting was a bright woman, with an original mind and methods, a deep knowledge of girl nature, and a great fondness for the girls themselves. Miss Nutting had no ruts, and there was never any knowing where you would find her next. This kept the girls on the alert. They could never settle down into an easy-going, jog-trot round; their minds were kept awake and active.

Miss Nutting seemed to know by intuition what was going on, without looking. This being Monday morning, two of the girls in the younger history class, not knowing their lessons, were struck with the happy thought of writing the hardest dates and names on the palm of their hands with ink. It was done unobtrusively; and, for once, Miss Nutting did not seem to notice. But when the history class

recited, she asked only review questions. The lesson over, she said,—

“Now, Elsie and Jennie, you can go to the dressing-room and wash the ink from your hands;” and the girls withdrew, discomfited, amid the giggles of the whole room.

The school had only one session, closing at one o’clock. Amy went home with Marguerite to luncheon. Marguerite lived in Oak Grove, not far from the schoolhouse. Her brother Theodore attended Professor Clark’s school for boys, also in Oak Grove. Until this year, the children had been taught at home by a private teacher. This first year of school-going was a great experience for them. Theo, especially, was full of his new experiences in the world of boys on which he was now launched. At the lunch-table to-day, he astonished his sweet, gentle mother by saying,—

“There’s a boy at our school I guess I shall have to fight.”

“Theo!” exclaimed his mother, in horror.

“He sits behind me, and this morning he kept putting his feet up on me. Then I pinched his legs well. Then he leaned over and whispered, ‘If you pinch my legs any more, I’ll knock the dust off your eyeballs.’ Do you suppose he can do it?”

“What a terrible place school is!” exclaimed his mother, who felt much like the hen who stands on shore seeing her ducklings launch out upon a pond.

Theo’s father, who was the Rev. Dr. Theodore Strong, an eminent Presbyterian minister, said,—

“You must not seek quarrels, Theodore. You know we are commanded to live peaceably with all men.”

"Yes, father, but you know we are commanded, too, to 'fight the good fight of faith,'" said Theo, who was never at a loss for a Scripture quotation to be used in his own defence.

"We will talk the matter over again by-and-by," said his father.

After luncheon, the children went upstairs into the roomy, sunny nursery, and acted scenes from "Uncle Remus," Marguerite and Theo being as fond of acting as Amy herself. Theo was a most realistic Brer Fox, Marguerite, whose negro dialect was perfect, an equally good Brer Rabbit; while Amy figured as the Tar Baby. Then they acted school scenes. Amy was Miss Nutting; Marguerite was Mademoiselle; and Theo made a lively and unmanageable school, assuming many young-ladyish airs and affectations, and requiring all the time of both teachers to manage him.

In this agreeable manner, time flew all too quickly; and four o'clock, the hour when Amy was to go home, came sooner than they could believe.

"Come again soon," said both cousins, as Amy said good-by.

When Amy turned into Hillside Avenue, she saw a furniture car backed up before the McDuffy house. And oh, joy, a girl of her own age stood on the front porch, watching the men unload the furniture. Amy looked shyly at her, and saw that the new neighbor was also watching her with interest.

"I've seen her, mamma!" cried Amy, as she rushed into the library. "I've seen her!"

"Seen whom?" asked her mother, with aggravating calmness, not looking up, indeed, from the letter she was writing.

"The new neighbor. She has beautiful long brown hair, and she wears it just as I do mine, only it is banged on her forehead; and she looks so pretty and pleasant. I wonder what her name is. Do you think Kitty and I might go over and call to-night?"

"I am very glad if there is a girl of your own age in the family," said Mrs. Strong. "But I hardly think they are ready for calls yet. Wait until they are settled."

But the next day, when Amy came home from school, the new neighbor was again on the porch, and she and Amy smiled at each other.

"Oh, mamma," said Amy, "I really must go over to-night. She looked lonely, and as if she wanted to know me as much as I want to know her."

As soon as Kitty came home from school, Amy ran in for her to make the important call.

"What do you think her name is?" asked Amy, as they walked along.

"Oh, I don't know," said Kitty. "It might be anything,—Grace or Nellie or Mary or Edna or anything."

"I hope it's Eleanor or Isabel or Elizabeth," said Amy.

The new neighbor met them smilingly.

"I am your neighbor, Amy Strong," said Amy, "and this is Kitty Clover."

"My name is Irene, — Irene Brownell," said the new neighbor.

"Irene! how romantic! how uncommon!" thought Amy.

Irene's mother, a pleasant, gentle lady, now appeared, and said, —

"As the house is in such confusion, Irene, you may take your friends up into your room, which is partly in order."

Here, in Irene's pretty room, looking out over the valley back of Hillside Avenue with its over-arching elms, the girls sat and chatted as fast as three girls' tongues could fly. They told each other all their past history; and when the dinner hour was so near that Amy and Kitty evidently must tear themselves away, it was with many promises on Irene's part that she would return their call promptly, and on theirs to come again soon.

"Is n't she lovely?" asked Amy, enthusiastically, as they walked home.

"Ye-es, rather," said Kitty.

"I like her so much, don't you, Kitty?"

"I haven't seen enough of her yet to know how I shall like her," said Kitty.

Amy found that she could not rouse Kitty to her own pitch of enthusiasm over the new neighbor. In truth, Kitty felt a little jealous of Amy's intense admiration of the new-comer. She had always had Amy to herself. Laura lived so far away, and was always so busy, that they saw her only occasionally; and so Amy and Kitty had been constantly together with no one to come between them. Kitty loved Amy dearly, and it was hard for her to welcome one who threatened to be a rival in her friendship.

At the dinner-table that night, Amy could not quite repress her enthusiasm, although there was a guest present. But as it was Aunt Mary, who had come down from Dayton for a few days' shopping and visit, she felt free to talk.

"Irene is the most interesting girl I ever knew," she said. "She has lived everywhere: in Portsmouth and Baltimore and Philadelphia and Washington, and I don't know where. They came from Washington here. And she's been in Africa, and"—here Amy stopped to take breath before imparting her chief item of interest—"she's actually been in Spain, and seen Gibraltar and the Alhambra!"

"She certainly is a travelled young lady for her age," said Professor Strong. "And she has seen something worth seeing if she has seen the Alhambra."

"I would rather go there than anywhere else," said Amy, whose one desire had been to see the Alhambra, ever since reading Irving's account of it. "But it is better than nothing to know some one that has been there, especially a girl of my own age. They were there a whole week. Their hotel windows looked right into the Alhambra grounds, and sometimes their lunch-table was set out in the grounds. It was fascinating, Irene said. Her mother read 'Tales of the Alhambra' aloud to them while they were on the spot. Think of that! And Irene goes on cruises in her father's steamer sometimes. It is so interesting to know the daughter of a captain in the navy. How glad I am they moved on Hillside Avenue!"

Here on the evening wind there arose a most distressing sound,—a disconsolate wail or moan, as of some creature in acute distress.

"What is that?" asked Aunt Mary, who was nervous.

"It's only Duke, our neighbors' dog," said Professor Strong.

"He often uplifts his voice in that way," said Mrs. Strong.

"The poor creature must be suffering," said Aunt Mary. "Some one ought to help him."

"Not at all," said Professor Strong. "It is only a little way he has. He is a most affectionate creature, and cannot endure to be alone. He pines for human society; so he howls to while away his loneliness."

"I should be almost superstitious about it," said Aunt Mary, as Duke's mournful cries wailed around the house like a banshee.

Here Rob's cheerful whistle was heard. Duke's wails subsided into a joyful bark or two; the Clovers' door was heard to close, and silence reigned outside.

"They've taken him into the house," said Amy. "That was what he wanted. Irene is coming over to see me to-morrow, mamma. She loves to read, and she draws beautifully, and she likes to imagine stories and draw them out, just as I do. It will be so nice to have a friend that likes to do the same things that I do."

The next morning, when Professor Strong went to the front door for his morning paper, it was not there; but a dog's fresh tracks on the porch led the professor to the corner of the house to investigate. Yes; there was Duke just disappearing around the corner of the Clovers' house, carrying his head very high, because the paper was unfolded, and dragging on the ground. The professor laid aside his dignity and gave hot chase, but in vain. Duke, clinging to his prize, fled like the hunted deer, down into the hollow, over the brook, and farther up on the opposite hill than the professor cared to follow. Here lying down, he

calmly chewed the remains of the paper in the very face of the helpless professor.

The torn fragments of another paper on the Clovers' porch showed that the rogue had begun his morning meal on the home paper. When Mr. Clover came out for his paper, he was properly exasperated at Duke's mischief.

"That dog must be punished," he said. "He must have a lesson that will break him of his tricks."

When, after what he thought a safe interval, Duke came sneaking guiltily home, he was taken up on the front porch, seated on the ruins of the newspapers, solemnly chastised, and then banished to the back yard in disgrace, with the awful words "Bad dog!" ringing in his ears.

He seemed quite downcast and penitent, but that did not prevent his stealing one of Bridget's rubbers which she, in a moment of carelessness, left outside the laundry door, that very afternoon.

It was an exciting time. Amy, Kitty, Rob, and Elliot chased the culprit up hill and down, to rescue the rubber, Duke evidently thinking it a most delightful new game and enjoying it intensely, while Bridget stood on the back porch and hurled all sorts of malditions on his silky head.

"Just let me catch you around here again, you rascal, and it's a good dipper of hot water you'll get on your back," she said.

"Oh, Bridget, you would n't be so cruel," said Amy, who came panting up the hill with the rubber, which had at last been wrenched from Duke, not without showing plain marks of his teeth.

"Indeed and I will that," said Bridget. "It's a

good scalding I'll give him. I'll pickle him well, if I catch him. Bothering the life out of me the whole time! I can't so much as leave a dish-wiper on the grass to sweeten, but he's after it. He's a nuisance, if there ever was one."

Only the next day, a righteous retribution overtook Duke. A series of loud, frightened barks and howls drew all the Clovers and Strongs to their windows to see what could possibly be the matter. Loud was the laughter when they saw Duke with a large mat on his back, his tail between his legs, running in abject fear down the driveway, trying to escape from this unknown and terrible enemy that clung to him so closely. It seemed that he had been on the front porch, engaged in one of his favorite amusements, worrying and dragging about a large carpet mat lying there, when the wind, which was blowing hard, suddenly whisked the mat upon Duke's back, and away he had run in terror, carrying the mat with him to the stable before he could escape.

CHAPTER VII.

HALLOWE'EN.

A BOUT this time Kitty had a candy-pull to celebrate her twelfth birthday, and Irene was one of the guests. Then Amy had Kitty and Irene to dinner; and in the evening they played "Authors," and "Messenger Boy," and "What D'ye Buy?" and told fortunes out of Amy's fortune-teller. So the acquaintance soon grew intimate.

Mrs. Strong was much pleased with Amy's new friend. Irene was a bright, refined child, with most pleasing manners,—a child who had been carefully trained by a mother who was an innate lady. She was a little old for her years, the natural result of having lived about the world so much, and being most of the time with older people. She had two young lady sisters, and had seen a good deal of society through their eyes, and consequently had imbibed some society ideas beyond her years, with which she liked sometimes to impress the other girls.

Mrs. Strong was amused when Amy, who had never known that she had a "form," begged her always to begin at the bottom when she buttoned her dress.

"Irene says it will make you have a fine form to button your dress up from the bottom."

Amy also said that Irene was "training her eyebrows." About this time too, Amy had a temporary

fit of wearing a pair of old kid gloves to bed to soften her hands.

"I expect the next thing Amy will be bathing her face in hot water to prevent wrinkles," said Mrs. Strong to her husband, who only laughed at the little girls' fancies.

Irene attended Miss Ludwick's School for Young Ladies in Edgeton, which, like Amy's school, had but one session. The unfortunate Kitty was not released from the public school until four o'clock in the afternoon, and if by chance the problems were unusually hard, was sometimes kept after school, besides. This threw Amy and Irene much together. They wrote stories together, and illustrated them with elaborate drawings; and Amy soon found that Irene liked to play with dolls as well as she did. Their doll playing was not ordinary child's play, however; it was rather dramas enacted with dolls.

For this purpose little china dolls were much better than their large dolls, because they could have an infinite number of them, dressed to represent men, women, and children, and all grades of society. They found a delightful store up in the village, where you could buy any amount of dolls' furniture for five cents, while ten cents was a small fortune there.

"Miss Blau always sets out her most enticing things when Irene and I go in," said Amy. "She has such a cunning wardrobe for only ten cents she showed us to-day. Can't I have ten cents more, mamma, and go right back and get it?"

"Miss Blau looks upon you and Irene as regular customers," said Mrs. Strong, "and well she may.

But her gain is my loss. This constant flow of five and ten cent pieces bids fair to ruin me financially."

A doll settlement on a large scale was laid out in the Strong's attic, with a large summer hotel (made from an old bird-house), stables and mansions constructed from bandboxes furnished elaborately from Miss Blau's store, and even a theatre, for which Amy painted scenes. Here Amy and Irene spent much of their time afternoons.

The dolls' names indicated that they belonged to the highest class of society, where the most romantic events were probable, and were in ludicrous contrast to their size. Among Irene's family were Sir Louis and Lady Vanderbuhl and their daughter Elnora, Helen Ricosoli, Count Rinaldo Rinaldini, Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, and Elizabeth Summerson; while Amy's numerous family contained such eminent persons as Lord and Lady Fauntleroy, Lady Vivian Herbert, Lord and Lady Spirendoff and their fair daughter Theodora, Madame Oskavetsky, Viscount Armand de Goupil, Madame de la Pompadour, Lord Ingersoll, and the Prince of Abyssinia. There was also a numerous retinue of servants.

Kitty did not care much about dolls, or other imaginative plays; she preferred active outdoor sport. When she came home from school, it was not pleasant to find Amy always absorbed in playing dolls with Irene, or in making dolls' clothes, or just going up to Miss Blau's to buy more furniture.

"Come, girls, do come outdoors and play," said Kitty, one pleasant afternoon, coming up the attic stairs. "You're always playing with these stupid dolls."

"It's such fun," said Amy.

"I don't think so," said Kitty. "Won't you come out now?"

"Oh, we can't possibly go now," said Amy. "The Viscount de Goupil is just about eloping with Lady Vanderbuhl's daughter Elnora. Sir Louis has just discovered it, and it's so exciting. You stay here and play with us. You can have the Prince of Abyssinia and his whole family for yours. That is their palace," said Amy, pointing to a bandbox standing on its side, elaborately furnished, with four innocent-faced china dolls leaning stiffly against the little chairs.

"And you can have the court carriage and the coachman and footmen for yours, and come and take our families out driving," said Irene, rolling toward Kitty a tin horse and wagon, manned by small Japanese dolls.

But even this magnificent offer did not tempt Kitty. She sat down on a trunk and looked gloomily on, while the play proceeded.

"Oh my charming, my adored Elnora," said Irene, in an affected tone, speaking for the viscount, a china doll about a finger tall, whose yellow hair Amy had darkened with liquid shoe blacking, giving him also a suitably romantic mustache, "fly, fly with me! Leave your cruel, stony-hearted parent, and fly with your adorer!"

Then they "flew."

"Madame, where is my daughter? I demand my daughter this instant," growled Amy, in the gruff voice of Sir Louis. "You cannot deceive me. She has fled with that wretch, that detested villain, the

Viscount de Goupil. Order the carriage at once. I will pursue them to the very end of the earth."

Sir Louis Vanderbuhl, in the little tin wagon, was rattled off around the big chimney, whither the lovers had fled to sunny Italy, when suddenly Amy noticed that Kitty had disappeared.

"Why, where is Kitty?" she exclaimed. "I did n't see her go away, did you?"

"No; I thought she was still here," said Irene.

"I'm afraid she's mad," said Amy.

"She has no reason to be," said Irene. "We tried to have her play with us, and offered her the Prince of Abyssinia, and the court carriage, and everything. Oh, Amy, the Viscount de Goupil is killed! Sir Louis ran over him with the carriage, and killed him instantly. I presume he did it purposely, he is so hard-hearted. Elnora is heart-broken. 'Oh, my husband! My dearest Armand! My loved De Goupil!' Hear her moans! We shall have to give him a state funeral."

But even this absorbing event did not divert Amy's mind from her friend Kitty. Presently she said,—

"Let's not play this any more now. We shall have to put all the dolls into mourning, anyway, before we have the funeral. Let's go outdoors now, and play with Kitty."

When the girls came out, they found Kitty running and playing with Duke. But when they called, "Come on, Kitty, let's get as many children as we can, and play 'Pennsylvania,'" Kitty took no notice.

"Let's go over there and make her come," said Amy.

The girls ran over on the Clovers' lawn, whereupon

Kitty scampered into the house, and shut her door with an emphatic bang.

"She is mad," said Amy, looking sober. "I told you she was."

"I never saw anything so unreasonable," said Irene.

She and Amy walked up and down in front of the Clovers' house to show Kitty that they did not care, and then Kitty came out and ignored them some more.

So the trouble grew; and when Amy went into the house, feeling deeply wronged, she amazed her mother by saying emphatically,—

"I'm never going to speak to Kitty Clover again as long as I live!"

"Why, Amy," said her mother, "what is the matter? You and Kitty have always been such friends."

"I can't help it," said Amy. "I'll never speak to her again, or take her up to get ice-cream, or soda-water, or anything."

Then she told her mother the whole story.

"Amy," said her mother, "I can't have you quarrel with Kitty. As long as you have played together, you have never had but one falling out before; and don't you remember how sweetly Kitty made it up then?"

Yes; Amy did remember very well. It was a year ago last summer. Kitty was up in Amy's room, waiting for her to dress, to go out and play with her. Amy, who was interested in some book, persisted in reading it while she dressed; and the more Kitty hurried her, the slower she worked. Finally, Kitty, provoked, slyly unbuttoned all Amy's buttons behind, and ran away home. Then, too, Amy had declared she would

never speak to Kitty again. But when she went out to dinner, on her plate was a shoe-box filled within, and covered on top, with lovely sprays of mock-orange blooms. The Stronges had no mock-orange bush.

Amy's face flushed, and lit up, at sight of this peace-offering.

"I'm going to fill this box with roses," she said, "and take it into Kitty's the back way," which she did, and gave it to Maggie, who put it on Kitty's plate, and after dinner the girls played together as usual, and Kitty spent the night with Amy.

But although Amy remembered all this, she felt deeply injured, and hardened her heart. She said,—

"She has no reason to treat me so, and I will not endure it. I think she is —"

"There's Kitty now," said Mrs. Strong, "coming up the back steps."

Amy fled upstairs into the bath-room, and locked the door. Kitty came into the library.

"Can I see Amy a minute, Mrs. Strong?" she asked.

"Yes," said Mrs. Strong. "I think you will find her in the bath-room."

Kitty, who was as much at home in the Stronges' house as in her own, ran upstairs and knocked on the bath-room door. No response.

"Amy, Amy," pleaded Kitty, "please open the door." A dead silence the other side the door.

"Amy," cried Kitty, "I forgive you."

"What for?" asked a stiff voice from within the bath-room.

"Because I was mad at you."

There was no resisting this. But Amy felt awk-

ward and a bit ashamed about making up. She said nothing, but there was a scrambling noise inside the door; the transom flew open, and Amy's head appeared through it, looking down on Kitty. Then both Kitty and Amy laughed.

"After you've laughed, you can't be mad any more," as Amy said to her mother afterward, telling her about the reconciliation.

Amy unlocked the door; and she and Kitty came down into the parlor and played "Chopsticks" duets of their own composing until dinner-time. And the next day, Kitty assisted with much pleasure at the state funeral of the Viscount de Goupil, which was held in the Brownells' parlor, Irene's mother and sisters being fortunately all out that afternoon.

Amy wore a black ribbon on her hair, out of respect to the departed; and the little dolls were all dressed in black.

"Where is Lady Fauntleroy?" asked Irene.

"She can't come," said Amy. "She is n't very well. The fact is, she has broken her head."

"What a pity!" said Irene. "We must have her funeral to-morrow, while the dolls are all dressed in black."

"But she is n't dead yet."

"Oh, sure enough. I forgot. Does n't the viscount look sweet?"

The girls admired the viscount's appearance greatly. He lay on the parlor table in a box marked "Scented Glycerine Soap," all bordered with lace paper. The funeral exercises were conducted by Irene. First she read from Longfellow's poems, and then she played "Up in a Balloon" quickstep "slowly and

solemnly"—so Amy told her mother—on the piano.

The viscount was buried in Irene's private cemetery on the hillside, back of her house. Here were buried Irene's fish. Whenever the steward on her father's boat came up to the house, he brought Irene tiny fish which she always expected to raise. Her experiments deeply interested all the children on the avenue. In a large tub at the back door, Irene had a small catfish and several minnows. The catfish was named "Bonheur," the others in pairs, as Irene thought she detected intimacies among them. There were "Romeo and Juliet," "Damon and Pythias," "Buddha and Brahma." Bonheur was the fish king, because he was the largest; but in spite of this honor, and in spite of his lucky name, he was the first to die.

Notwithstanding all the care Irene gave her fish, perhaps because of her well-meant attentions, the fish kept dying, though the supply was often renewed, until now twenty-one were buried in the cemetery. At first, they were buried in small boxes; but the supply of boxes running low, Irene made a huge tomb out of a large soap-box set in the hillside.

Burying the viscount did no harm, as the very next day he was dug up as good as new, and was even able to attend Lady Fauntleroy's funeral, she having considerably died.

The next night being *Hallowe'en*, Irene invited Amy and Kitty to spend the evening at her house, to celebrate the day with appropriate ceremonies. The girls were delighted at this invitation. It had been so aggravating to hear the boys saying,—

"Are you going out Hallowe'ening to-night, Rob?"

"You bet I am! Won't we have fun, though?"

Merely because they were girls, they could have no share in the sport; but now they too were going "Hallowe'ening."

No sooner had the shades of evening fallen over Hillside Avenue than there began a scampering of boys up and down, and the sound of tin horns woke the evening echoes. The Evarts could not think what was the reason that their door-bell kept ringing so mysteriously, apparently by invisible hands. After going three times to the door, in response to rings, and finding no one there, the maid, exasperated, lay in wait, and jumped out at the next pull of the door-bell. There was a scuttling of boys off the porch, and a hasty vanishing around the house corner, but not before they received some good advice from the maid about not daring to do that again.

Mrs. Strong, who had been through Hallowe'ens before, prepared for the siege systematically.

"Nora," she said to her second girl, "go out before dark and bring the door-mats, the scraper, and the porch chairs into the hall; and tell Bridget to roll the ash-barrel into the laundry."

Mrs. Kaiser well knew the danger, but scorned to prepare for the enemy; she would fight them face to face, and defend her own possessions. At the first peal of her bell, out bounced Mrs. Kaiser, followed by her dog Rover. Rover barked furiously at the boys' heels, and Mrs. Kaiser cried,—

"I'll send for the police, and have you all arrested, unless you keep away from here."

The boys, pursued by Rover, fled around the corner

of the house, into the arms of Mr. Kaiser, — a small but determined man, armed with a cane, who had made an unexpected raid from the side door. There was a hot chase, and a narrow escape for the boys, who were only able to outrun Mr. Kaiser by being somewhat younger and more nimble.

This was fun. It was comparatively tame to go and ring a door-bell and have no one take any notice of it. After trying this a few times, the unresponsive house was given up as poor sport. So now the chief efforts of the marauders were concentrated on Mrs. Kaiser's house. Much satisfaction was had from "tic-tacs" fastened on her windows, and a string tied to her door-bell, which could be pulled from across the street, where, from behind a big spruce-tree, the wild and fruitless raids of Mr. and Mrs. Kaiser and Rover could be witnessed and enjoyed in safety.

The war was kept up until the rap of the private policeman's club down the street made it prudent to retire in good order.

The next morning Mrs. Kaiser's porch chairs had vanished, and only after a long search were found down in the hollow back of her house; her door-mat was found in Dr. Trimble's carriage, at the other end of the avenue; and her ash-barrel had forever disappeared, perhaps having helped feed the flames of a huge bonfire that had illuminated the street during the evening.

At the Brownells', the girls were invited out into the kitchen, where they found the Misses Brownell, another young lady, and also a young gentleman. They tried many magic spells, well-known to have

the power of revealing the secrets of the future, which, oddly enough, all seemed to point directly toward matrimony. First, they bobbed for apples in a tub of water. The way an apple will not stand still in the water and be bitten, the rolling and sinking and treachery of it, as it slips away just when you are sure you have it, and lets your face into the water, are beyond belief, until you have tried it. Amy, Kitty, and Irene thought it the greatest fun imaginable, and often came up with their faces all dripping, sputtering and breathless, from the fruitless chase of obstinate apples.

Still more interesting was the test of the pans. In one pan was water, in another a penny, in another a ring, in another a thimble. Irene explained it to the girls,—

“ You are blindfolded, and then we change the pans about. Then you walk to the table, and whichever pan you put your finger in, decides your fate. If your finger goes into the water, you will travel a great deal; the ring pan means marriage, the penny pan great wealth, and the thimble pan that you will never marry. People sometimes have another pan with ashes in it, for death, but mamma will not allow that.”

Much laughter was caused by pretty Miss Zelia Brownell putting her hand in the thimble pan. The young gentleman, Mr. Bradbury, said warmly that it was plain there was no truth in this spell, and wished to try something else. Then they each named two chestnuts, and roasted them on a fork. The chestnut which popped off first was the favored suitor. Then they went outdoors in the dark, and

pulled up sticks at random and brought them in as symbols of their future husbands.

"Girls, if you will help me," said Amy, "I will pull up this young ailanthus-tree."

The tree, carried in triumph into the kitchen, was found to far surpass the somewhat crooked sticks which were all the young ladies had been able to find.

The most exciting spell of all was that of the mirror. Miss Anna Brownell put a looking-glass on the ice-chest in the cellar, and placed a box before it for a seat. Then she hung a coat up behind the box. All being ready, she said,—

"You are each to take a lighted candle in your hand, and go down cellar alone. You must sit on the box with the candle in your hand, eat an apple, and look in the glass, and you will see a vision of your future husband in the glass — perhaps."

Nothing would have induced Amy to go down cellar alone in the evening at home, but, animated by the excitement of *Hallowe'en*, she actually went. Her stay was but brief, and she ran upstairs very fast.

"Did you see anything, Amy?" asked Irene.

"Nothing but an old coat," said Amy; "but I heard a mysterious noise."

"I only saw the coat too," said Kitty.

It turned out that the girls had injured the spell by sitting with their backs to the mirror. They both declined to try again, and Irene went down, but soon came running up fast.

"Oh, girls, what do you think?" she panted. "I was hardly seated when I heard an awful groan! I was terribly frightened. Then some one said 'Boo!'

Those boys had seen the light, and were all at the cellar window. I was so frightened!"

"That was the noise I heard, then," said Amy.

When Miss Zelia went down to try her fate, Mr. Bradbury made much fun by slipping slyly down, and peering over her shoulder into the glass; but Amy and Kitty well knew that this would do him no good. They knew, for Irene had told them, that Nixie was not the Brownells' own dog, but the property of a young lieutenant in the navy,—a very particular friend of Miss Zelia's, who being off on a cruise, had left Nixie in her care. They knew how Miss Zelia petted Nixie, how she even washed him with her own dainty hands, how she combed him and curled him, and tied blue ribbons on his collar; and they felt that the omens were all unfavorable to Mr. Bradbury.

After refreshments, Mr. Bradbury and the young ladies kindly walked home with Kitty and Amy. A body-guard was very acceptable to the girls; for a big bonfire at the other end of the avenue lit up the sky, around it danced many dark figures, tin horns were blowing, and boys, some of them in masks and queer costumes, were flying all about, and there was no knowing what might happen.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RIDE ON PEGASUS.

NOVEMBER brought some lovely warm, hazy days, a genuine Indian summer. On one of these tempting days, Irene and Amy were sitting out on the seat on the Strong's lawn. Amy wore a new red felt hat, and a new red cape to match. The soft sunshine fell on the girls through the rustling brown leaves that still clung to the beech-tree, and seemed to allure them forth to adventure. Something out of the common line seemed proper on such a day as this, especially when one had on a new red hat. Amy said,—

“I wish I knew what to do. It is such a pleasant day, it seems as if we ought to do something unusual.”

“It makes me feel like rambling in the fields, and exploring,” said Irene.

“Oh, I know what to do,” said Amy, struck with a happy thought. “Let's go over to Beech Woods.”

“It sounds charming,” said Irene.

“It is,” said Amy. “It is where we always go for wild flowers in the spring-time. It is n't very far.”

“I should like to explore the country around here very much,” said Irene.

“I'll show you the way,” said Amy; and off the girls started for Beech Woods.

They went up the avenue to its end, then down a new avenue, as yet houseless, then climbed up a

steep bank, over a fence, and were in the open pasture land. There was a brook running through a wild gorge at the farther limit of the large field; and the steep banks and summits of the gorge were covered with a scattering grove of huge old oaks and beeches,—original forest trees that had not yet been cut. But civilization already threatened Beech Woods.

"Oh, dear, is n't it too bad?" said Amy. "They've opened a new street leading this way since I was here last spring. The next thing we know it will be carried through here, and spoil these beautiful woods."

"What a perfect shame!" said Irene. "But is n't it delightful to be out here in the fields, such a pleasant day?"

"Yes, indeed," said Amy; "it seems so free and wild."

The air was fresher and sweeter out here in the open than back among the houses. There was a great stretch of blue sky overhead; and inspired by the warm sunshine, the sweet air, the sense of wide freedom, the girls played about as happy as lambs or kittens, or any other young creatures. Under the dead leaves on the hillsides they found plenty of beech-nuts. Then they came to a great poplar-tree, old and rotten, that had been blown over in last winter's gales. Its top lay high up in the air, supported by the stout branches beneath; and never was tree more tempting. The girls mounted the trunk, and found nice seats high up among the upper branches. There they teetered up and down on the swaying tree-top. Then they swung off by their arms, clinging to the highest branches, daring each other to feats they had learned in their school gymnastics.

The trunk of the old poplar was white, marked with odd spots and blotches.

"This tree-trunk looks like a circus horse," said Irene.

"So it does," said Amy. "Oh, Irene, let's play it's Pegasus, the winged horse!"

Amy was fresh from a re-reading of one of her favorite books, Hawthorne's "Wonder Book."

"Delightful!" said Irene. "And here is the Fountain of Pirene on the hillside."

A spring trickled out of and down the hillside, making a wet spot much trampled by the feet of cows and horses that had come to drink there.

"These tracks are the Chimæra's," said Amy; "and oh, if here does n't come the Chimæra now!"

A peaceful cow was rambling in their direction, stopping now and then to crop the grass, still as green and fresh as in summer, here in Southern Ohio.

"We had best mount Pegasus at once, and away," said Irene, who was afraid of cows, hastening to scramble up into the highest branches of the prostrate poplar, closely followed by Amy.

On the swaying branches they soared in fancy through the sky, far beyond the clouds, yet able to look down to earth and view in safety the ravages of the dread Chimæra, who, far from snorting out fire and desolation, as they played she did, mildly drank a few sips of water from the spring, and then rambled off again.

But now they saw two rough-looking men climb the fence below the woods, and strike across for the hillside.

"I think we had better go home," said Amy, now

suddenly remembering that her mother never allowed her to go to Beech Woods without some older person.

The girls slipped down out of the tree so hastily that their dresses received some sad rents; but not stopping for that, or to pick their way, taking the shortest cut for the fence, they ran on, splashing through plenty of clay mud.

"Play the Chimæras are after us," Amy found breath to say, as they climbed over the fence into the road.

But their pretty play was over. It was hard to come down thus rudely from their aerial trip through the sky on the back of beautiful Pegasus to common, every-day life again; but worse trials were in store for them.

When they came to the Clovers', Laura and Kitty were out playing "tap hands" with Rob, Elliot, Willie McGrau, and Ronald.

"Oh, Kitty," said Amy, "we have had such adventures. We —"

But Kitty turned her back and walked away into the house.

"How queer Kitty acts!" said Amy.

"She's mad at you," said Rob.

"I don't see why," said Amy.

"She thinks you and Irene ran off on purpose to get away from her. She says you go off and play with Irene every day, and don't wait for her," said Rob; "and she is n't ever going to play with either of you again, or speak to you, or anything."

"I never heard of anything so silly," said Irene. "We never thought of running away from her."

"We just went off for a little walk, without think-

ing anything about it," said Amy. "Of course I would love to have Kitty go; but if she does n't want to play with me, of course she need n't."

Here appeared Mrs. Strong, just returning from a meeting of the Woman's Club.

"Amy," exclaimed her mother, "what a looking object you are! Where have you been to get yourself in such a plight?"

Poor Amy, who had felt so fine and happy in her new hat and cape, soaring aloft on the back of Pegasus, now realized that her dress was torn, her hands black and dirty, her hair tangled by the breeze and the branches, and that her shoes were plastered with yellow clay.

"I took Irene over to Beech Woods a little while," she said, for Amy always told the truth.

"I am surprised," said her mother. "You know I never let you go there alone. I consider it unsafe. You knew better than to do such a thing."

"It was such a lovely day," said Amy, "and we both felt so country-ish, as if we must get off into the fields, that I forgot. I did n't think."

"And to take Irene, too, as particular as Mrs. Brownell is about her!"

Irene had gone home, meantime, to face her fate.

"Now, remember after this, Amy," said her mother, "never think of going off this avenue, without my special permission. Come in now, and go out in the kitchen and dry your shoes, and then see if you can clean them."

All this was very un-Pegasus-like, and far from pleasant. Then Bridget, when Amy entered the kitchen, said,—

" You 're a nice young lady, coming tracking mud all over my clean floor, like a great dirty boy."

" Oh, Bridget, don't be cross," said Amy. " I'm full of trouble. Mother 's been scolding me, and I don't believe Mrs. Brownell will ever let Irene play with me any more, and I 've torn my dress, and I 've got these awful shoes to clean, and Kitty and I are never going to speak to each other again!"

" Indeed, and that *is* news," said Bridget. " Now, don't you fret about that. I would n't be afraid to bet that you and Kitty will be playing together agin to-morrow, as intimate as two twin-sisters ; and I 'll clean your shoes for you," added Bridget, whose heart was always in the right place, if her tongue sometimes belied it.

" Oh, thank you, Bridget," said Amy. " But I *know* Kitty will not make up. She is very mad, and she is never going to speak to me again, and so I 'm never going to speak to her either ; so how can we make up, you know ? "

" You just wait and see," said Bridget.

The kitchen windows were high above the ground, for the house stood so far back on the sloping hillside that there was ample room for the laundry beneath ; and now, on the south kitchen window, came a mysterious tapping.

" What 's that ? " asked Amy, startled.

Now came another rap ; and Amy ran to the window in time to see Kitty drop a clothes-pole, and run around the corner.

" It 's Kitty ! " said Amy, her doleful face lighting up with smiles.

" There, see that. What did I tell you ? " said Bridget.

Here a stick came sailing in through the open transom over the kitchen door.

"Run out quick and catch her," said Bridget.

Amy darted down through the laundry, and pounced out unexpectedly upon Kitty, who had hid beneath the kitchen porch after her last peace-offering.

"I've caught you," said Amy.

Then they both laughed.

"We never thought of such a thing as running away from you, Kitty," said Amy.

"But you are always playing with Irene," said Kitty.

"Well, you know, Kitty, Irene and I both get out of school so much earlier than you, I can't help it."

"Will you promise," said Kitty, "always to play with me after I get home from school?"

"Yes, of course I promise," said Amy. "I think the best way is for us all three to play together, and be good friends. Irene is a very nice girl, don't you think so now, really, Kitty?"

"Yes, I do," said Kitty. "I like her very much when she doesn't get you away from me."

This ended the trouble; for Amy loved Kitty as much as Kitty loved her, if she did feel the charm of Irene's gifts and graces. As she told her mother, when they were having their bedtime confidences that night,—

"Of course I can't help loving Irene, she is so bright and pleasant, and she likes to draw, and imagine stories, and play dolls, and do everything that I do. But Kitty,—why, Kitty is just like my own sister."

Henceforth, Amy was more careful not to seem to

slight the old friend for the new, and the three girls were the best of friends.

Amy, having changed her shoes, came down to Bridget with the soiled pair, to find Nurse Nannie at the kitchen door, in deep distress.

"Miss Amy," she said, "have you seen or heard of Victor anywhere?"

"No, Nannie," said Amy, after thinking a moment. "I have n't seen him this afternoon. Perhaps he is somewhere with Ronald and Jack; he generally is."

"No, they are playing at home; and Victor is n't there."

"Perhaps he is playing with Dixon back of Mrs. Herndon's," said Kitty.

"No, I have been there. We have n't seen him since school was out. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I know that precious darling is lost! This comes of sending him to public school. His father would do it. They all think they know better than poor old Nannie, and now they see how they come out. Oh, dear! If his blessed mother in heaven knew this! I shall never see my boy again."

And poor old Nannie wrung her hands and cried. Every one tried to console her.

"Don't cry, Nannie," said Amy. "We'll go right off and look for him, and I know we shall find him somewhere."

"I'll run and get Rob and Elliot to help," said Kitty. "I guess he's just gone home from school with some boy. Don't feel badly, Nannie. We'll find him for you."

While the girls ran to get their mothers' permission to hunt for Victor, Bridget tried to comfort Nannie.

"Now, Nannie," she said, "don't take on so. It will all come out right yet. God is good, God is good, and"—here the Irish love of a good story overcame Bridget's piety for a moment—"and the devil ain't a bad man ayther, as Pat said when he was crossin' a dape brook, and the plank began to break under him, and him a wanting to be right with both sides, feeling uncertain-like which way he might be going. Be aisy in your mind. The boy 'll turn up all right."

"I shall never lay eyes on that blessed boy again," said Nannie, refusing to be comforted.

Mr. Dana had, this fall, as one means of weaning the boy from Nannie's apron-strings, sent him to the public school, where Ronald, Dixon, in fact, all the boys on Hillside Avenue, went. At first Nannie wanted to go up to school with him every morning.

"No," Mr. Dana had said. "Victor must learn to take care of himself sometime, and fight his own battles, like other boys; and he is plenty old enough to begin."

"Fight his own battles, the poor motherless darlin'," Nannie had muttered to herself, but dared make no open protest when Mr. Dana had spoken so decidedly.

But when Victor, in his most lordly manner, had commanded Nannie to come up every day when school was out, and bring his new goat and cart, that he might ride home, Nannie had joyfully obeyed. Victor had ridden home every night in great state, with Nannie for a body-guard to keep off the other boys, who might else have torn the goat and cart, not to say Victor himself, to pieces, in their determination to all ride in the pretty cart. But as soon as Mr.

Dana discovered this fine plan, he sternly forbade Nannie's taking the goat to school again. Victor had been obliged to walk home like the other boys, and take his chances among them, and now all Nannie's forebodings were justified.

Not only Amy, Kitty, Rob, and Elliot hunted about for Victor, but Mr. Green joined in the search with all his dogs; but no trace of the missing boy could be found. There was great excitement on the avenue, and every one was interested, and full of sympathy.

At first, Miss Grace had thought Nannie needlessly alarmed; but when it became plain that Victor was nowhere on the avenue, and had not been seen since school closed, she too became anxious. She ran over to Mrs. Neale's to consult her.

"Perhaps some one has stolen him," said Mrs. Neale. "You know we read so many such things in the papers."

"I don't think any one could entice Victor away," said Miss Grace. "He has been literally brought up by Nannie on the Charlie Ross story. Not long ago, that odd-looking old man whom the boys call 'Nick in the Woods,' who goes around on horseback delivering papers, met Victor down at the other end of the avenue, and very kindly offered to take him on before him, and give him a horseback ride home. As Victor is always wild to ride the ponies at the Zoo, I said,—

"'Of course you accepted such a chance as that.'

"'No, indeed,' said Victor. 'I knew very well that he only wanted to steal me.'"

"Suppose you question Ronald a little," said Mrs. Neale.

"When did you see Victor last, Ronald?" asked Miss Grace.

Ronald hesitated, looked embarrassed, and finally said,—

"Victor said I mustn't tell. He said he would whip me if I told, but I'm not afraid of him."

"Ronald, you must tell me everything at once," said Miss Grace, now thoroughly alarmed.

"He's run away," said Ronald.

"Run away! Where to?"

"I know," broke in Jack, who had been listening with big black eyes wide open in his intense interest. "He runned away with Jimmie Peters. I guess they runned away into the city, for I saw them get into the cars together."

"Don't tell Nannie, boys," Miss Grace had the presence of mind to say; and then she consulted with Mrs. Neale as to what she should do. It was decided to telephone at once to Victor's father. A message came back from his office that Mr. Dana had been suddenly called out of town, and would not return until late at night. Miss Grace felt like wringing her hands and wailing with Nannie, but tried to control herself, and think what to do next.

"You had best telephone George," said Mrs. Neale,—George being Mr. Neale,—"and have him leave an exact description of Victor with the chief of police, so that the police will be on the look-out for him."

Poor Miss Grace, with tears blinding her eyes and choking her voice, telephoned,—

"Say a boy seven years old, large and strong for his age, with large blue eyes, red cheeks, and curly yellow hair, wearing a gray knickerbocker suit and

blue necktie" — and here Miss Grace broke down. The thought came over her, how she had tied that blue tie only this morning, and how bright and handsome Victor had looked, as he had thrown his arms around her neck and kissed her afterward. Now perhaps she should never see him again alive.

"All right; I'll go over right away," Mr. Neale had replied; and later he telephoned that the chief would put all the force on the look-out for the missing boy. So now there was nothing more to do but wait; that was the hardest part.

Miss Grace sat in the silent house, over which the stillness of death seemed already to have settled, so unnaturally quiet did it seem without Victor running in and out, and listened to the sobs from Nannie's room, where Nannie had taken to her bed, heart-broken, and thought of all the lost and stolen boys of whom she had ever heard. Never had the hours seemed so long. The shades of evening settled slowly down. The girl came into the room and lit the gas.

"Turn it low, Mary," said Miss Grace, who sat at the window, straining her eyes to peer out into the darkness.

Hark! what was that? Some one coming up the back stairs? Surely that was Victor's step. Miss Grace flew to the door in time to see Nannie, with tears and cries of joy, clasping in her arms the returned prodigal.

A very dirty, tired, sorry-looking little prodigal he was. After he had eaten something, and Nannie had bathed him, and then, poor soul, gone to bed completely exhausted, Victor sat on his Aunt Grace's lap, safe folded in her arms, and told her the whole story.

One of Mr. Dana's theories was that it was best for Victor to have plenty of spending-money, that he might learn by experience the proper use of money. That morning, he had happened to have more than usual in his pocket. When Jimmie Peters, at recess, had tried to outbrag Victor, and Victor in bragging back had happened to reveal his wealth, Jimmie had struck up a violent friendship then and there for him, and had proposed that they run away from school and go into the city, and have such a good time as no one ever heard of before, spending Victor's money.

"Did n't you know that it was very, very naughty, Victor?"

"It did n't sound naughty the way Jimmie put it. He said, 'Come on, Victor, let's have some fun.' I thought it was only fun. He said we'd get back again before any one missed us, and no one would ever know it."

"What did you do in the city, Victor? Tell auntie all about it."

"First, we rode on the platform of the car going in," — a much-coveted privilege that Victor was never allowed. "Then Jimmie pretended he was going to push me off, and the conductor made us go inside and sit down."

Aunt Grace mentally thanked the conductor.

"When we came to Fountain Square, we walked along till we came to a fruit-stand. We bought some bananas and ate them; then we went into a candy store and bought some chocolate drops and molasses taffy, and ate them, and then we bought some more bananas. Then a hand-organ man came along with the funniest monkey you ever saw. You just ought to have seen him, Aunt Grace. He was all dressed up,

and the man held him by a string. He let him run a little ways, and then pulled him in again. Once he ran right up Jimmie's leg! Jimmie was frightened. I would n't care if he ran up my leg. Then the monkey took off his hat, and passed it all around the crowd, just like a little boy. I put some pennies in his hat.

"We followed the hand-organ and monkey a good ways, and I put some more pennies in the monkey's hat. By-and-by I felt all around my pockets, and there were n't any more pennies! Then the hand-organ man went into a beer saloon, and I said to Jimmie I guessed we had better go home now; and it turned out that Jimmie had n't any money, and he did n't know where we were, or the way home, or anything. I began to cry, because it was coming night, and I was afraid we were lost, and some one might steal us, and we should never get home again. But a big policeman came along, and he said, —

"'What's the matter, sonny?'

"He took us up to the end of his beat, and told us where to go, and so we came home. We had to walk all the way, 'cause my pennies were all gone. And oh, my legs do ache so, and I'm so tired, and I feel a little sick, too. Jimmie said his father would thrash him when he got home, and he guessed we had better run away for good, now we had started, and never go home at all; but I wanted to come home, if papa did whip me."

"Your father will not whip you, Victor," said Aunt Grace; "but he will be very sorry and unhappy that his little boy has done such a naughty thing."

"I'll never run away again, Aunt Grace, if Jimmie

Peters teases me ever so hard," said Victor, his eyes shutting together as he leaned his head against his aunt, already half asleep.

Miss Grace postponed all further talk, or possible discipline, and hurried the weary little prodigal into bed.

"I'm glad I'm in my own bed to-night," said Victor, as Aunt Grace tucked him in, and kissed him good-night. He rolled over, and was fast asleep before she could turn the gas out.

Mr. Green, whom Mrs. Strong called the "Hillside Avenue Gazette," because he bore the news of the neighborhood happenings from one house to another on the street, dropped into one kitchen after another during the evening, to spread the glad news of Victor's safe return, and all felt safer about their own children because the little boy was under his own roof again.

That evening Amy read again Hawthorne's beautiful story of "The Chimæra."

"Do you know what that story means, Amy?" asked her mother.

"I'm not certain," said Amy, "though I think I have an idea. What is it?"

"Pegasus is supposed to be the horse on which poets take their flights. The poets are supposed to drink inspiration from the Pierian spring, and soar aloft on Pegasus. Hence their flights are so much higher than those of ordinary mortals."

"What a pretty idea!" said Amy. "I mean to be a poet by-and-by. I have made some little trips on Pegasus, have n't I, mamma?"

"Your Pegasus is such a small colt," said her

mother, laughing, "that it is hard to tell yet whether he will grow into a real Pegasus or not."

"My poetry rhymes much better than it used to, anyway. My last poem is n't so very bad, now, really, mamma. You need n't laugh. Kitty and Irene think it is beautiful."

"Let me see it," said her mother.

From a mass of drawings, stories, blocks, and original plays, that crammed the drawer in the library table sacred to her own use, Amy brought forth the poem. It was called —

MY DOGGIE.

When I was a little girl,
A long time ago,
I had a little doggie,
And his name was Flo.

His coat was of a curly brown,
A curly, silky brown ;
And he filled with admiration
All the people of the town.

Whene'er I went out walking
With my little doggie Flo,
It set the people talking,
For he wore a ribbon bow,

And a little, little bell,
That went tinkle, tinkle, tink,
And made my little doggie
Woggie wink, wink, wink !

Each stanza was illustrated at the end with a painting of the little girl and her doggie, the ribbon bow, the children filled with admiration, etc.

"I wish that poem were true," said Amy. "I do want a dog so much. I have no pet but Prince. Won't you get me a dog, papa?"

"I'll see about it," said the professor, to whom his wife had handed the "poem," and who was reading it with an amused twinkle of his eye.

"Of course, 'woggie' does n't mean anything," explained Amy. "I had to put it in to make the poetry come out even, you see."

"Yes, I see. Poetical license, I suppose," said her father. "I've often noticed the same thing in grown-up poetry."

Then observing that Amy, her eyes shining and cheeks glowing, had seized a block of paper and pencil, and was briskly scribbling, he said,—

"The best place for poets of your age, my child, is bed. Jump down from Pegasus, and scamper upstairs."

"Oh, papa, I have thought of such a lovely idea for an illustrated poem!"

"To bed, to bed," said her father, relentlessly. "This is no time for ideas."

And to bed the would-be poetess had to go, consoling herself as she went to sleep by making up another chapter in "The Distressed Princess," — a continued story with which, night after night, she was beguiling the sorrows of having to leave the delights of the library below.

CHAPTER IX.

LOST, STRAYED, OR STOLEN.

THE next excitement on Hillside Avenue was the mysterious disappearance of Comet, Miss Rose Carman's St. Bernard dog. Comet was an immense fellow, as kind and good-natured as he was big. He bore tolerantly tricks of smaller dogs that he could easily have shaken to death with one grip of his great jaws ; and he allowed Elliot to pull him around and take all sorts of liberties with him. He had been given to Miss Rose by a young gentleman who was a dog fancier ; and with him came a long pedigree, showing that his ancestors were dogs of high degree, in the habit of taking prizes at Bench shows. He was very valuable ; and when he was found to have disappeared, every one except Grandma Gaylord was sure he had been stolen to be sold, and freely prophesied that Miss Rose would never see her huge pet again.

Grandma Gaylord's theory was that a gang of desperate burglars had stolen or poisoned him, with the express object of entering the Carmans' house at midnight and murdering and robbing the inmates. After hearing this theory, Amy was afraid to go to bed alone for some time.

It had been a pleasant sight to see pretty Miss Rose, whom every one loved and admired, strolling along the avenue, escorted by her immense pet. When

she went into a house to call, he lay patiently on the porch waiting for her, to the terror of all the people who had soap, thread, and the other necessities of life to sell. When his mistress came out, Comet manifested his joy by jumping up on her, nearly knocking her over, and galloping around her in uncouth gambols, "like a great cow," as Miss Rose said, laughing.

"It looks just like a picture," old Mrs. Wigsley was wont to say, as she stood at the window watching the progress of the group down the street. Every one was sorry for Miss Rose, and tried to help her find her dog in vain. The last seen on the avenue of Comet, he had rambled off, as was often his custom, in the train of Mr. Green and his dogs. Mr. Green, on being examined, said, —

"I dunno whar he did go to. I was at Mrs. McGrau's, shovelling coal, and then I 'lowed to go over to Mrs. Goldschmidt's and clean a carpet. I disremember when he did clar out. I spect someun done gone and stole that dog. There's lots o' worthless trash up to jest sech mean tricks."

No one thought for an instant of suspecting Mr. Green. They would as soon have thought of suspecting Dr. Taylor himself.

Miss Rose advertised the dog in all the papers, offering five dollars' reward. In a day or two a shabby, sly-looking man appeared, bringing Comet, and telling a long, disjointed tale about a "friend" of his having found the dog over in Oak Grove. This excellent man, reading the description, recognized it at once as that of the dog his friend had found; but the friend would not relinquish the dog without he would pay him a dollar.

Miss Rose, without stopping to sift this tale too closely for facts, cheerfully paid the six dollars, and great care was henceforth taken to keep Comet at home.

The Brightside Club and the Other Club continued to hold their regular meetings. Mrs. Herndon had given each of the members, in memory of Ned, a Brightside pin to wear,—a silver Maltese cross bearing the letters “I. H. N.” The children did not become angels all at once; but perhaps they were now and then reminded to do some little kindnesses, or practise some self-restraint that otherwise they might not have thought of.

Bryant Taylor was slowly recovering from a severe attack of typhoid fever. Amy liked Bryant and felt very sorry for him, and thought it would be a Brightside-like thing to do to write to him often funny letters, telling all about the sport the children were having, the letters being illustrated with highly colored pictures. These letters were quite an event in the weary sick-room, and helped shorten the long tedious days of recovery for Bryant.

After Mrs. Humphreys died, Amy and Kitty took some of their own money, went to the greenhouse, and bought flowers to put in Miss Sadie Humphreys’ parlor, that there might be one bit of brightness there when she and her father came back from the sad journey to Massachusetts, where they had taken Mrs. Humphreys’ body to rest amid the scenes of her childhood.

“The dear children! How sweet and thoughtful of them!” said Miss Sadie, the tears in her eyes blurring the colors of the lovely flowers whose bloom

and fragrance, and, above all, the loving thought they represented, did brighten a little the empty, desolate house, where "mother" would nevermore come.

And one day, when Rob had Van Gooding down, and was about to "give him what he deserved," suddenly it occurred to him that this was not exactly the thing for the members of Brightside clubs, and he let Van up, saying,—

"You can go now. I've shown that I can whip you if I've a mind to."

"Ho! let's see you do it, though," shouted Van, jeeringly, but careful to keep at safe running distance.

The club, at its meeting early in November, had decided after much discussion that it would be pleasant to do something for the Colored Orphans for Christmas. Mrs. Strong had strongly advocated the cause of the orphans.

"In the first place," she said, "the Colored Orphans are our neighbors."

The Colored Orphan Asylum was on Brook Street,—a street which zigzagged off across the hills to Oak Grove, directly behind Hillside Avenue. The land on Brook Street had once been the farm of an old Quaker, said to be the original of Simeon Halliday in "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Certain it is that at the time when Mrs. Stowe was living at Lane Seminary, and gathering, unconsciously, the material for that book, this old Quaker's house was one of the first stations on the underground railroad for dark-skinned fugitives from the Kentucky shore. From time to time he had sold small sections of his farm to negroes, until Brook Street had become largely a negro settlement. There was a little Baptist church there, from whose

summer evening meetings the quaint, shouting, chanting melodies often resounded with not unpleasant effect over to Hillside Avenue; and here also was the Colored Orphan Asylum.

Mrs. Strong continued her plea, —

“In the next place, the Colored Orphans are not a fashionable charity. There is a fashion in charities, as in all else. The institution is very poor; and there is no place that needs help more, or where it is more thankfully received. I was over there yesterday. There are forty children there now, and the superintendent said anything we could do for them to help give the children a Christmas would be most acceptable.”

“I know that my mother will give things for them,” said Ben Bruce, confidently.

“Of course she will,” said Mrs. Strong, for Mrs. Bruce was one of those people, none too common, whom her friends were actually afraid to approach with an appeal for charity, not from the usual reason, but because it was well known that she would cheerfully rob herself and almost take the clothes off the backs of her own family, so generous, so sympathetic was she, so filled with a longing to help the unfortunate ones of this earth.

The children decided to collect all the cast-off clothing they could, and also to bring in toys, games, and books from their own stores.

“If each only brings two things,” said Mrs. Strong, “you will have quite a collection. But probably you will get much more than that.”

On hearing of the club’s plan, Miss Rose and Miss Sadie said they would contribute candy enough to

fill forty candy-bags, and help the girls make the bags; and Miss Maude Clover, Kitty's big sister, and the Misses Brownell offered to dress some dolls. The girls immediately decided to have a sewing-society every Saturday till Christmas.

The Other Club graciously accepted an invitation to join in the scheme, and were stoutly determined to beat the Brightsiders by bringing in the largest collection of gifts for the orphans; so the strife in good works ran high on Hillside Avenue about that time. Thanksgiving Day some of the mothers sent over to their neighbors, the Colored Orphans, turkeys, vegetables, etc.

Toward night, Thanksgiving Day, Kitty, feeling the need of taking a long walk to help digest an abundant dinner, called for Amy and Irene, who gladly joined her. Duke was also of the party, and Nixie was anxious to go, but Miss Zelia would not trust him off the avenue. The girls were going to walk over on Brook Street, in the hope that they might chance to see some of the Colored Orphans, who had suddenly become such objects of interest to the Hillside Avenue children. Brook Street lay high, and was naturally one of the best situations in the vicinity. There were pleasant views from its summits, and it was interesting to get a back view of their own homes from its heights. So the girls set forth gayly for Brook Street.

Apparently every family on Brook Street kept a dog, that did not keep two. Dogs of every known size and sort began to collect around the party, manifesting a most alarming interest in Duke, as a stranger in those parts. Duke, the most amiable and affection-

ate of dogs, had not "a bit of fight in him," as Rob sometimes said, disgusted. He would even turn tail and run for Prince, Amy's cat. Prince knew her power, and did not hesitate to bristle up and dive at Duke, if he presumed to so much as set a foot on the Strong's porch when she was out there.

"Go home, sir!" cried Kitty, sternly, at the surrounding dogs.

But although she stamped her foot, and although Irene and Amy joined her, the strange dogs were not in the least terrified. Their leader, a peculiarly vicious-looking black dog, with one ear mostly torn off in former frays, made a sudden onslaught on Duke. Duke ran so fast he looked, as Kitty said, "like a brown streak on the ground," disappearing around the next turn, closely followed by the crew of mongrel dogs.

"Oh, they will kill him!" cried Kitty.

"No, they won't," said Irene, "for here they come now."

The dogs were indeed returning, consoling themselves by small fights among themselves along the way, and by chasing the chickens which also abounded on Brook Street. The girls ran on around the corner, half expecting to find Duke's slaughtered remains lying somewhere about. But he was nowhere to be seen; and although they called "Duke! Duke! come here, sir," until they were tired, no Duke appeared.

"Dear me!" said Kitty, "what shall I do? I am afraid he is lost, and we shall never see him again."

"Perhaps he will run home across lots," said Amy. "Dogs know their way everywhere better than people."

"Perhaps we shall find him at home when we get there," said Irene.

The girls hurried home, but no Duke was there, nor did he appear next day, nor the next.

Rob, who loved Duke like a brother, even if he would not fight, was certain he had been stolen, like Comet.

"Duke is not quite so valuable as Comet," said his father.

"But may n't I offer a reward, father?" said Rob, firm in his belief that some one had stolen his precious dog.

"Yes," said his father, laughing.

Rob wrote several notices, in his best hand-writing, with flourishing capitals and much under-scoring; and Elliot went with him and helped tack them up, so that one might read on all the biggest tree-trunks on Hillside Avenue, and around the corner on Grand Avenue, these words,—

LOST!!!

an Irish Setter Dog of a Red Color, with a White spot on his Neck. Had on a collar with a Blue Ribbin Bow tied to it.

FIVE DOLLARS REWARD!!

will be payed on his Return.

P. Q. CLOVER, Esq.,
Hillside Avenue, Edgeton.

Two days passed, but even this notice brought no news of the missing Duke. Lonely enough did it seem without the old fellow. There was no Duke waiting, when school was out, to welcome Rob and Kitty with eager barkings and bouncings, no Duke to

run and join in all the games; and at night an unnatural silence reigned.

"I should be really glad to hear poor Duke howl and moan again if he would only come back," said Amy.

Even Bridget "spoke kindly of the absent one," and admitted that he had some virtues.

Rob began to question whether he ought not to raise the amount of the reward.

One night, as the Strongs were all peacefully reading by the library lamp, suddenly there was a violent peal of the door-bell, which seemed to indicate pressing business of unusual importance.

"It is a telegram from one of the boys. Something has happened," said Mrs. Strong, prepared for the worst.

But it proved to be only Rob Clover, who burst in, all excitement, shouting,—

"Amy, Duke's come home!"

"Oh, has he?" asked Amy, dropping her book, as excited as Rob himself.

"Yes. When Paul brought over the milk to-night, there was Duke by the kitchen steps. He acted as if he were too tired to go up the steps, but Paul helped him. He is awful thin. I think that some one has had him shut up, and starved him, and that Duke managed to get out and run away home."

"May I go over to Kitty's a little while, mamma?" asked Amy.

Her mother consenting, Amy ran back with Rob, to help welcome Duke back to the bosom of his family, for she loved him almost as much as the Clovers themselves did.

When she came home she had a long story to tell,—

“ You never saw any one look as poor Duke did, so thin and dirty, and covered with burrs, every inch of him, and all that beautiful long silky hair on his legs and tail nearly pulled off. We went to picking off the burrs. Rob took his tail, Kitty took one leg, and I another. Miss Maude took another, and Mrs. Clover took his head, because his silky ears were the worst ; they were stuck close to his head.

“ Then we gave him a bath, and combed him, and dried him. Then Rob took him out in the kitchen, and gave him a whole platter of meat. He ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate ; and then he drank, and drank, and drank,—three cups full. Then he lay down in the library, and we all sat at his feet. He was wild with joy to be at home again. If one of us started to go away, he would put his paws on us and hold us back. He was so tired he could hardly stand. Kitty held him in her lap to rest him ; and Rob held his head, because he is too long for Kitty’s lap. I could n’t help thinking of those verses in the Bible, ‘ He was lost and is found ; he was dead and is alive again.’ Duke is a kind of a prodigal son too, is n’t he, mamma ? ”

“ His home-coming seems much like it,” said her mother.

CHAPTER X.

DRAMATIC.

A MY being of a highly nervous and excitable temperament, Mrs. Strong had never felt it wise to take her often to the theatre. Twice only, on special occasions, had she been allowed to go; and once, long ago, she had the delight of hearing "Pinafore," when it was given by a summer theatrical company at the "Zoo," as the Zoological Gardens are always called in Cincinnati.

This performance had been particularly amusing. A structure looking like a real ship was built in the lake devoted to aquatic birds. Tiers of seats for the spectators were erected on the shore, facing the ship, and protected from the intense heat of the summer sun by an awning. Amy was thrilled with excitement when the Admiral, in full uniform, was rowed out to the ship by his sailors, going aboard with much naval state and dignity. Little Buttercup put out from the shore too, amid the loud quackings of the ducks and geese, who knew not what to think of these strange intruders, while the cranes and storks stalked up and down the shore in wild-eyed dismay, as the music of chorus and orchestra resounded through their solitudes. It was so extremely warm on the unshaded water that Ralph had been glad to borrow the umbrella which Josephine carried, while he sang his solo. It was all most delightful to Amy, and was

often re-acted at home, with dolls for the leading characters, Amy doing the singing for all.

Amy had a strong taste for acting. Her lively imagination often found pleasure in "dressing up" and "being somebody," usually some one of high degree,—a princess, or a fairy queen, or the Countess Spirendoff, a favorite character, founded on a real lady of that name, at whose regal mansion Philip and Gladys had been royally entertained during a recent concert tour in Russia. The accounts of this trip through Russia, which Philip had written home, had not only filled Amy with delight, but had given her many valuable points on the private habits of princes, countesses, the "nobility and gentry" generally. It was another strong bond to Irene, when she secretly confided to Amy her passion for acting, and her high resolve to be an actress when she grew up. Irene was writing a play now, called "*The Three Princesses.*" Amy immediately began one called "*The Witch's Curse.*"

While the dramatic fever was thus raging, Joseph Jefferson and his company came to Cincinnati. Whenever Amy had begged to go to the theatre, as she often did, she had always been told,—

"Whenever Jefferson plays here again, you shall go. If you go to the theatre at all, I want you to see the best."

Amy was not slow in reminding her mother of this promise; and accordingly Professor Strong bought tickets for the Saturday matinée of "*The Rivals.*" Irene beset her mother to go, using the unanswerable argument that Amy was going, and therefore she must, to which argument Mrs. Brownell yielded.

It was an afternoon the two girls did not soon forget. The theatre was crowded with a fine-looking audience. Jefferson played Bob Acres, Florence was Sir Lucius O' Trigger, and Mrs. Drew Mrs. Malaprop; and the fun and brightness of both play and acting were irresistible. Amy appreciated all the bright points of the play as quickly and keenly as any grown person present. She laughed until she thought she could laugh no more. More than one stranger sitting near smiled in sympathy, as they looked at the little girl with the broad black beaver hat resting on her flowing golden hair, whose eyes shone so with delight, whose mirth was so contagious, and who threatened to burst her gloves in the rapture of her applause.

But Amy was unconscious of all on-lookers. She was wholly absorbed in the play. It seemed painfully tame and prosaic to come down out of it all, from the brilliancy and warmth of the cosy theatre, into the cold, every-day light of the common street, where electric car-bells were clanging and newsboys calling, and the crowd hurrying on as if the delightful, wonderful old world of "The Rivals," where people wore powdered wigs and knee-breeches, and trains and stomachers and petticoats, and called each other "Sir" and "Madam," did not exist.

All the way home in the car, while her mother was talking with Mrs. Dawson about the weather, and Mrs. Bruce's essay at the club meeting, and the last heresy trial, Amy saw only the world of romance in which she had been living. Irene came in at once to talk it over with her.

"Was n't it perfectly splendid?" said Amy.

"I enjoyed it excessively," said Irene. "How I should love to act Lydia Languish!"

This going to the play gave a new impulse to the dramatic fever. Amy and Irene had no trouble in getting up a dramatic club among the other girls, who were all charmed with the idea. There were not only Kitty and Laura, and Frida Goldschmidt, who, it is true, was a little younger (two years is such a yawning gulf when you are twelve years old), but who, it was felt, could be used to good advantage, but also Frida's friend, Dorothy Paxton, from the other end of the avenue; while little Lulu Boyd, Claribel, Phyllis, and the two little Goldschmidts would serve nicely as maids, villagers, and "the chorus" generally. Then, fortunately, Mrs. Frazier's niece Janet had come to spend a year with her aunt and attend school, which gave another girl to the avenue. Janet was only too glad to join the new club, and would make a valuable member. Dorothy Paxton wanted to ask her particular friend, May Morgan, daughter of Judge Morgan, who lived on Grand Avenue. The other girls did not know May very well; but it did not take them long to get acquainted, for May was a wide-awake young lady, who entered into the doings of the club with great spirit.

The club was much agitated on the question of the admission of the boys.

"They would never learn their parts, I know," said Kitty.

"And they would be sure to make fun of us," said May, who had three brothers, and spoke from experience.

"Then they cannot belong," said Irene, decidedly;

"but we can allow them to attend the performances sometimes, if they will behave properly and not bother us."

Irene drove "The Three Princesses" through to a hasty conclusion. The play was given in the Brownells' back parlor, the audience occupying reserved seats in the front parlor.

The three princesses were sisters who ruled over the countries of Japan, Greece, and Italy. Irene was the Princess of Japan, because she had a complete Japanese costume, even to the shoes, which her father had brought her home from Japan. Indeed, the play had been written expressly to fit this costume. Arrayed in it, with her hair done up in Japanese fashion, with long Japanese hair-pins, and waving a Japanese fan, Irene made a quaint and pretty little princess, looking not unlike the lady on her fan.

Amy was the Princess of Greece. She liked this much, because, as she told her mother,—

"I can wear a full Grecian costume, and it is so poetical."

The full Grecian costume consisted of a white skirt of Mrs. Strong's that trailed on the floor all any one could ask, over which was gracefully draped a sheet, leaving Amy's arms bare. Her arms were covered with silver bangles, borrowed of Miss Maude and the Misses Brownell, who had good-naturedly helped the little girls. Her hair was twisted up in a Psyche knot behind, and bound with bandeaux of white glass "pearls;" and she looked exactly like a graceful Grecian maiden of old, as nearly as the audience could judge.

Kitty, as the Princess of Italy, shone forth in an

old pink silk party dress of her sister Maude's. Her hair was twisted on top of her head, fastened with all Maude's hat-pins. Her appearance was greatly admired by every one, including herself.

Frida, as maid of honor to the Princess of Japan, wore a white dress, and the typical waiting-maid's cap.

The plot was simple. It seemed that the Princesses of Greece and Italy were the wicked sisters of the Princess of Japan. Devoured with envy and hatred on account of her superior beauty, they had laid a plot to induce her to flee the country. The maid of honor — concealed behind a Japanese screen, in full view of the audience — overheard this plot, which was couched in the most melodramatic language. The conspirators were to tell the Princess that the Mikado, whom she abhorred, enamoured of her charms, had determined to carry her off and marry her. It was expected that she would then flee the country, never to return, leaving the wicked sisters in power. The maid of honor of course hastened to reveal this plot to her mistress, who was seen reclining with more than oriental languor among the cushions of a lounge, and who, all through the play, was more haughty than any one could imagine.

In the second act, the Princess appeared with all the majesty possible, considering that her Japanese shoes, held on only by a ribbon, flopped up and down as she walked, threatening every instant to drop off. The wicked sisters kissed her hand hypocritically, and then the Princess of Greece burst forth, —

“Oh, sister, I have something terrible to tell you !”

"What is it?" asked the Princess of Japan, with much haughty superiority of manner.

"Oh, I cannot bear to tell it! It is too horrible! You tell her, sister. Break it gently;" and Amy covered her eyes with her hands, and fell back among the lounge cushions, overcome by her feelings. The Princess of Japan now turned to the Princess of Italy for the dread tidings, who, forgetting her part, came in with a later line, and amazed the audience by saying,—

"Sister, you are as fair as a rose!"

Amy sat bolt upright; and she and Irene stared aghast at each other, not knowing what to do. Then, as Amy said afterward, in describing the scene to her mother,—

"Irene laughed a laugh of haughty scorn, and I said,—

"‘And *therefore* the Mikado is determined to marry you.’ So we got out of it very well."

In the last scene, the Princess summoned her sisters, and told them that she "knew all." They fell on their knees before her, with clasped hands raised (displaying the bangles splendidly), imploring forgiveness, which was graciously granted; and the portières were run rapidly together by Rob and Elliot amid the loudest applause from the audience.

"The Witch's Curse" was enacted later, in the upper room of the Strong's stable. There was a prince (Kitty), in love with a gypsy maiden (Amy), a princess (Irene), in love with the prince and naturally hating the gypsy maiden, and a wicked witch (Frida), who aided the princess in all her plots against the humble but unspeakably beautiful gypsy maiden. The wicked princess drank by mistake from the

poisoned goblet prepared by the witch for the destruction of the gypsy maiden, and tumbled headfirst upon the Strong's old cot bed, dying in the most approved theatrical manner, to the intense gratification of all the audience except Lulu Boyd's little brother, Lenny, who was frightened and cried, and could only be comforted by having a ride on Amy's old rocking-horse, which figured as a spirited steed in all dramas where a horse was needed.

The play, begun after school, lasted so late that the shades of night began to fall before it was finished; and Mrs. Strong had to go out with a lantern and light the children down the steep stairs and over the kindling pile, they all saying,—

“Oh, Amy, we have had such a lovely time! The play was beautiful.”

Encouraged by these successes, the “Hillside Avenue Dramatic Club” now ventured on a real play, the farce, “My Turn Next.” This play was to be given in the upstairs room of the Clovers’ stable. Now an unlooked-for difficulty arose. Rob, who was excluded from the fun, said,—

“I won’t have my armory used for a theatre. My guns have to stay there; and, besides, we boys want to drill up there right away.”

“We will go ahead,” said Kitty to the girls, “and not pay any attention to Rob. As if I and my friends hadn’t just as good a right to this stable as Rob and his friends!”

The rehearsals began, but were much hindered by the persecutions of Rob, who made frequent appearances at most unexpected moments up the grain-shoot back of the stage, mocking the actors, and mimicking their words, to which he had been listening.

This was intolerable. One Saturday morning, when the girls had spent most of their time making raids on Rob and driving him away, only to have him turn up afresh in some new spot, Kitty said,—

“I will not stand your actions any longer, Rob Clover. I’m going right in to tell mamma of you, so now.”

“I don’t care,” said Rob. “It won’t do you any good, for mamma promised me I might have my armory up there.”

The case was laid before Mrs. Clover, who poured oil on the troubled waters by persuading Rob to let the girls have his armory, on condition that he was admitted to the play. As soon as he was a partner, and working for the girls instead of against them, Rob proved invaluable. He ran around and did all the girls’ errands, and made himself so useful, carrying up boards from the stable below and placing them across chairs and boxes for seats, that he was allowed to ask his friend Elliot to see the play; but all the older boys were sternly excluded.

Dixon, Ronald, Jack, Victor, and Oscar Stevens were also allowed to come. They, with Claribel, Phyllis, and all the little girls of the avenue, Nannie, and one or two other nurses with the baby brothers and sisters, and a mother or two, made an audience that literally “packed the house,” and even cracked the board seats, at least at the end where Mrs. Goldschmidt was seated.

The audience could not sufficiently admire the appearance of the actors. Red crayon and burnt cork had not been spared. Irene, Kitty, and May Morgan, who took the men’s parts, looked really ferocious

with their faces reddened all over, so that the whites of their eyes gleamed out with startling distinctness, with strongly corked eyebrows and huge corked mustaches curling fiercely up each round, smooth cheek. Amy, the leading lady, with violently hectic red spots in the centre of each cheek, corked eyebrows, and dark circles under each eye, which Irene had told her were necessary on the stage, looked as if in the last stages of consumption, an old brown "switch" of her mother's, worn as a wig, hiding her own hair, completing the effect.

"I never should know the child, never," said Mrs. Strong, while Mrs. Goldschmidt laughed so hard at Frida's red nose, as "Peggy," that the board cracked again.

The younger portion of the audience thought these startling effects simply wonderful. The play went off with great applause. Paul, Ben, Van, Fred, and others of the older boys added to the enjoyment of those so lucky as to be admitted by hanging around the stable, throwing sticks up against the little door of the "armory," making loud, derisive remarks, such as "Ho! a great play that is," and otherwise showed their lofty scorn of the whole thing.

But after the play was over, when the girls had resumed their own dresses, and washed off some of the burnt cork and red crayon, the boys condescended to stay and have a game of "I spy" with them, for which game the Clovers' stable, with the outlying facilities of the grape arbor, the hollow, the big elms, and the adjoining stables of the Strongs and the McGraus, was known to be the best spot on the avenue.

CHAPTER XI.

CHRISTMAS SHOPPING.

“COMING EVENTS” cast their shadows a long way before on Hillside Avenue, as Christmas drew near. There began to be a subdued excitement among the children at least a month before that all-important day. Many of them took the precaution to write notes to Santa Claus, mentioning exactly what they needed, or rather, wanted,—a great help to Santa Claus, no doubt, at a season when he has so much on his mind. Some of the younger children sent their notes directly to Santa Claus Land, *via* the fireplace, among them, Jack and Phyllis.

As the strong draught from the fire below seized Jack’s note, and whirled it, unburned, up the chimney’s black throat, he and little Phyllis, on their hands and knees, watched its disappearance with great satisfaction.

“Santa Claus will get that letter, won’t he, Jack ?” said Phyllis, in undoubting faith, her dark curls hanging down as she bent her pretty head to peep up the chimney.

“Yes; it’s gone right up there,” said Jack, half expecting to catch, as he peered up, a glimpse of Santa Claus’s huge hand seizing the important letter.

Amy was careful to leave her missive on the library table, where her mother would be sure to find

it. Mrs. Strong smiled as she picked up, after Amy had gone to bed, the letter addressed to—

“MR. S. CLAUS,
“Chimney Land,
“U. S. A.”

with a postage stamp bearing the head of Santa Claus in one corner, painted by Amy.

Within there was a modest list of thirty-five articles, beginning with “Sense and Sensibility” and “Persuasion,” the only ones of Jane Austen’s novels that Amy had not read, the list including a pony and cart, a few coffee-spoons, fancy writing-paper, cologne, candy, a “safety,” a “new muff to match my boa,” a drawing-tablet, a box of French prunes, a camera, books, a “clock for my room,” a telescope, a microscope, a kaleidoscope, a pet dog, a “new, *big* sled,” “more books,” a gold pen, and so on, the list ending with, “No. 35. Anything nice,” and this closing appeal,—

“Now, Mr. Santa Claus, I truly want *all* these things, so you need not laugh,

“Respectfully,

“AMY STRONG.”

Amy, Kitty, and Irene were all making presents for each other. These presents were profound secrets, often alluded to with the greatest mystery; and dark hints were frequently thrown out by way of keeping the secret more securely.

“I’m making something for you, Irene,” said Kitty.
“Don’t you wish you knew what it was?”

"Oh, yes, indeed. Do tell me, Kitty."

"Oh, I can't possibly," said Kitty. "Amy knows, don't you, Amy?"

"Yes; and it's perfectly lovely, I think," said Amy. "You ought to see it, Irene."

"It's in this towel," said Kitty, who had hastily bundled up her work when Irene entered the room where she and Amy were working.

Then Irene chased Kitty round and round the table in a vain attempt to peep within the towel's mysterious folds. Finally Kitty said,—

"If you won't chase me any more, Irene, I will show you what I made for Amy. Come upstairs. You must stay here, Amy."

"No; I'm coming too," said Amy, pursuing the girls upstairs, where Kitty arrived in season to lock the door against her, and then, with mysterious whispers, showed an embroidered tidy to Irene, quite forgetting that she had told her only the day before that her present and Amy's were just alike.

Another day, Amy took Kitty up to her room to see the drawer full of presents she had been making. She said,—

"You must stay outside, Kitty, until I take something out of the drawer. Promise you won't peep."

"I won't," said Kitty, sorely tempted, though, as she heard Amy smuggle something hastily into her closet and lock the door.

"Now you may come," said Amy, proudly displaying a drawer full of pretty gifts, mostly painted articles, all her own work and design. When Kitty found that there was a painted calendar for Irene, and another for Laura, it did not need the wisdom of

Solomon for her to guess that a calendar was also coming to her; for Amy's Christmas gifts were apt to run in waves. One year they were all scent-bags; the next, picture-frames; the next, calendars, and so on. But what would Christmas be without secrets and mystery?

One of the most important features of Christmas, in the opinion of Rob, Kitty, and Amy, was, that they should all go in town together shopping, unescorted by any older person, with their own money to spend as they pleased. One Saturday morning, about a week before Christmas, the three children started for the city on this important business.

Rob felt particularly manly this morning, for two reasons: he had on a new ulster, like Ben Bruce's, that came to his heels, and his mother had said to him,—

“Now, Rob, you must keep with the girls, and take good care of them. They don't know their way about the city as well as you do, so you must be sure to keep with them.”

“I'll take good care of them,” said Rob, smartly.

Rob was two years younger than Amy and Kitty, and considerably shorter; but having often been in the city on errands alone, as well as with his father, and having a good bump of locality, he knew his way about town very well, whereas the girls, who were never trusted in the city alone, knew nothing about it.

“You must not ramble about,” said Mrs. Clover. “Do your shopping, and then come directly home.”

“Yes'm, we will,” said the children; and off the party started in high spirits, full of chatter about their purchases and plans.

"Rob and I have five dollars to spend beside our car-fare," said Kitty.

"I have three dollars," said Amy. "Two of it is my wages, that I have been saving for Christmas this ever so long, and then mother gave me a dollar."

"Rob, I think you might let me carry that five-dollar bill in my purse," said Kitty. "Half of it is mine, and I'm the oldest, anyway. You'll lose it, maybe."

"No, sir," said Rob, strutting proudly along, in his new ulster, with the five-dollar bill in his pocket. "You're in my care, and it's my part to carry the money."

"I think you might," said Kitty.

"What lots of things we can get with so much money!" said Amy. "I think it is such fun to go shopping."

The electric car had a trailer attached; but both were crowded, even so early in the morning, with people going in town for Christmas shopping, among them several children with whom Kitty and Rob exchanged friendly smiles and "Hellos," they being fellow-pupils at the public school. The children did not mind if they did have to stand, lurching and bumping into each other every time the car stopped or started. It was all part of the Christmas fun and rush.

They left the car at the corner of Fourth and Walnut streets, undecided where to go first. Although it was so early, the streets were packed with people; and every car that came in from east, west, or the Kentucky side, was packed to the last inch of standing room, and emptied out its contents to swell the bustling throng. People hurried along with an absorbed,

busy look ; and if you stood a moment on a corner, you caught such expressions as these :—

“Don’t know what in the world to get him —” “Such a lovely muffler for only —” “Such a bargain —” “I’m almost distracted —” “Cheap tables —” “In an awful hurry —” “Tired to death —” “Do you think she ’ll like —” and so on.

The fronts of the stores were decorated with long wreaths of evergreen ; holly berries brightened many a window ; and before every florist’s stood a miniature grove of pine and spruce trees.

The wave of Christmas excitement swept over the children at once ; and they began to feel in a hurry, although there was not the slightest reason for haste in their case.

“Come, girls, hurry up,” said Rob.

“Where shall we go first ?” asked Amy.

“Let’s go into Duhme’s,” said Rob, favorably impressed with the glittering windows of that establishment, where priceless jewels and bric-à-brac vied with wares of the Rookwood Pottery, Royal Worcester, etc.

“Oh, Rob,” exclaimed Kitty, with the superior shopping wisdom of her sex, “our five dollars would n’t be anything at Duhme’s. We might buy one thing with it, but we could n’t buy twenty things, as we want to.”

“I think we had best go straight to Shillito’s,” said Amy. “Laura was there yesterday, and she says they have lovely things, and so cheap.”

“Well, come on, then,” said Rob, leading the way up Walnut Street.

On the Esplanade at Fountain Square, the children

saw a great crowd standing, staring up at the second story of Mabley and Carew's store, where a long bay-window had been temporarily thrown out across the whole front for use in a Christmas spectacle.

"What do you suppose is the matter?" asked Amy, on seeing the crowd.

"A fire, perhaps, but I did n't hear the bells," said Rob.

"No," said Kitty, "I know what it is, for Janet Frazier was telling me all about it. Mabley and Carew have a Bluebeard show. It is acted every hour, all day, up in that long window."

"Let's go over there and see it," proposed Rob.

"I want to awfully," said Kitty; "but you know, Rob, we promised mamma not to go anywhere, but just to do our shopping, and then come straight home."

"This is n't going anywhere," said Rob. "It's right on the way to Shillito's. We can just as well go across the Esplanade, and then along Fifth Street to Race, and so up Race to Seventh Street, as to go right up Walnut to Seventh."

"I'm almost afraid," said Amy, "to go into such a big crowd."

"What is there to be afraid of, I should like to know?" asked Rob. "I'll take care of you. Come along. It will begin pretty soon."

Rob's plausible arguments, combined with their own curiosity, prevailed with the girls; and they were soon standing on the outer edge of the crowd that was patiently waiting for the white curtains to be raised that now hid the splendors of the spectacle. A motley crowd it was: some "nice" people, whose

faces wore a half-smile at themselves for being there, yet feeling a little of that natural curiosity which makes the whole human race akin; and a good many people not so nice,—lounging tramps, ragged little girls with shawls pinned over their heads, newsboys, bootblacks, and so on.

Amy noticed a shabbily dressed, grimy-looking man standing near her. He looked so rough that she would have felt afraid of him, except that in his arms he carried a sickly little girl of three years old. Rough as he looked, he was so tender of the little one, wrapping the old shawl more closely about her, and turning his back to the cold northwest wind that swept bleakly across the Esplanade, lest it blow too rudely on her, that Amy's heart warmed to him. And when the little one's puny face brightened into smiles as the show went on, and she pointed a dirty little finger out of the shawl's folds, saying, "See, see, pitty," the father looked at Amy, whose sympathetic glance he caught, with a proud smile.

"She's a cute un, she is," he said.

"He loves that child just as much as my father loves me," thought Amy, with wonder.

The Bluebeard spectacle went bravely on. The uplifted curtain disclosed a home decorated for Christmas, with "the stockings all hung by the chimney with care." Santa Claus arrived on the scene in the most approved style, in a sleigh drawn by reindeer, came duly down the chimney, filled the stockings, and loaded the Christmas tree. The next scene was Christmas morning, and pictured the children's joy over their gifts. One little girl found a book of fairy tales among her gifts, and fell asleep while

reading the story of Bluebeard, dreaming that she was Bluebeard's wife ; and her dream was now acted before the audience.

A thrilling moment was when the curtain rose on Bluebeard's slaughtered wives, for "gore" was not spared, and it was a truly blood-curdling spectacle, highly gratifying to the audience. But the culminating moment of breathless interest was when, in the very nick of time, Fatima's brothers arrived on the back of a mechanical elephant of huge size, immensely satisfactory, even if plainly rolled upon the scene with many bobs and jerks. Enthusiasm was great when the elephant actually wiggled his tail, wagged his ears, and wobbled his head.

Absorbed in gazing, the children had been pushed farther into the crowd ; and Rob, in his desire to see, had gradually worked his way to the front, quite a distance from the girls. When the interest in the elephant was at the highest, suddenly a great tumult arose over near the post-office, where electric cars from every direction whirl madly all day long around the corner. There was much shouting, policemen running, every one else running, too, cars of all sorts blocked and stopped, a great crowd gathered, and soon a patrol-wagon dashed up, clanging its gong.

The crowd on the Esplanade rushed as one man to the scene of trouble. Amy and Kitty became separated in the rush, and had a few minutes of great fright and anxiety. Managing to get out of the crowd, they found each other by the fountain, where the statue of Mercy, calmly outstretching her hands in benediction, rained down the blessing of Ohio River water from them as serenely as if it were the quiet

night, when, under the shining stars, she has the Esplanade all to herself, save for an occasional policeman, whose rap startles the echoes among the tall, dark buildings looming up around her.

Rob had disappeared. After waiting a few moments, hoping he would come back, Kitty said, —

“What shall we do? I don’t know where Rob is, or whether he is coming back or not.”

“I think I know my way to Shillito’s,” said Amy, who had a sense of adventure in trying to find the way herself. “We will go on, and show Rob we can get along without him if he runs off and leaves us this way.”

Amy’s bump of locality was not large; but she led the way confidently up Vine Street, delighted to be for once exploring the city on her own account. But instead of turning west, as she should have done, at the corner of Seventh Street, she kept on to the north, finally turning off on Eighth Street.

“What a funny place to keep milk!” said Kitty, pointing to a can of milk set outside on the sill of a basement window.

“It must be set there to cool, I guess,” said Amy.

“Are you sure you know the way, Amy?” asked Kitty, as they turned another corner, and still Shillito’s big store did not appear.

“Yes; I am certain this is the way I came with mamma, when we went there for this hat. But it seems a great deal farther than it did that day.”

Here they turned another corner.

“Why, Amy,” exclaimed Kitty, “there is that same can of milk!”

Amy stared at the innocent can of milk as if it were an alarming sight, as indeed it was to her.

"We've come right around to the same spot again," she said. "We must be lost! What shall we do?"

"There comes a policeman," said Kitty. "Mamma has always told me, if I ever did happen to get lost in the city, to ask a policeman for help."

The policeman was very kind, turned the girls around, and told them the exact way to go. As they neared the corner of Seventh Street, they saw, to their joy, Rob running up Walnut Street, the long tails of his ulster flying in the breeze, his round cap pushed back on his head, his cheeks glowing red.

"Well," he exclaimed, all smiles at the welcome sight of the girls, "there you are at last! I've been looking everywhere for you. Finally, I thought maybe you would go to Shillito's. But what were you doing up Walnut Street?"

"Oh, just walking around," said Kitty, not wishing to increase Rob's feeling of superiority to them by admitting that they had been lost.

"I should think we had been walking around," whispered Amy; "walking around the square!"

"'Sh!" said Kitty. "Don't let Rob know. Where have you been, Rob Clover, I should like to know? With all my money in your pocket, too. Didn't mamma charge you not to leave us?"

"I didn't know but you were right with me. I only ran over to the post-office corner to see what had happened."

"What was it?" asked both girls, in a breath.

"A man was run over by an electric car and badly hurt. The patrol came and took him off to the

hospital. But what do you suppose happened to me? When I was going back to the Esplanade for you, I put my hand in my pocket, and my purse was gone!"

"Why, Rob Clover, what a shame!" exclaimed Kitty, ready to cry; while Amy hastily fumbled in her pocket, and to her relief found her own purse still safe. "We might as well go right home, then. There's no use in going to Shillito's now."

"It's too bad," said Amy, almost as sober as Kitty at this spoiling of their plans.

"Now, don't you go to crying, Kitty," said Rob. "Just wait till you have heard the whole story. There's the purse in my hand, you see. I stood there, feeling in all my pockets, and then feeling in them all over again,—there's lots of pockets in my ulster, you know,—when up came a great red-faced policeman hauling a big, ugly-looking boy along by the collar.

"'Lost anything, bub?' said he, when he saw me fumbling in my pockets.

"When I said I could n't find my purse, he made me describe it, and then he handed it out to me.

"'Now hang on to it, sonny,' he said.

"'You bet I will,' said I.—If any fellow gets this purse again, he 'll have to fight for it," said Rob, who now carried the purse tightly clutched in his hand, not trusting it in his pocket again.

"Was that big boy a pickpocket?" asked Amy.

"Yes, of course he was; and the policeman caught him at it, and was just taking him to the station."

"Well," said Kitty, "I'm awful glad you were lucky enough to get it back again. Now let's hurry to Shillito's and spend our money before we lose it

again. If you had let me carry the money, Rob, it would n't have been stolen."

"Hurry up," said Rob, not caring to argue this question.

Shillito's store, with all its distracting holiday decorations and special attractions, was a bewildering blaze of magnificence, among whose glittering temptations it was hard for the children to select. The store was crowded with a throng of people, among whom the children with difficulty squeezed their way to the handkerchief counter, where Rob wished to purchase a handkerchief for his father. But the clerks would n't seem to see Rob. The way they looked over his head, and each side of him, and through him, without seeming to see him, and waited on every one else but him, was very trying.

"Humph!" said Rob, "I guess they don't know I've got a five-dollar bill in this purse. They think because we're children, we're of no consequence."

Finally succeeding in getting the handkerchief, they contrived to squeeze into the elevator at the risk of suffocation, and rode up to the floors where were the toys and bric-à-brac. This floor was a perfect babel. Toy elephants were bleating, drums beating, trumpets blowing, and harmonicons tooting; and the distracted clerks, trying to wait on six persons at once, and at the same time answer the questions of several more, were yet good-natured and smiling. For did not all this mean Christmas?

The children thought the hubbub delightful, and squeezed about, oh-ing and ah-ing at all the tempting things and wonderful bargains, wanting everything they saw. But it was soon plain that even five dol-

lars would not buy everything, especially as they wanted to go to the Japanese Store and the Five-Cent Store. It was really distracting to keep their heads in the confusion, and make wise selections.

They all intended to buy presents for each other, but that was easily managed.

"Oh, Kitty, is n't that cologne bottle pretty ?" said Amy, pointing to a little bottle in a wicker frame shaped like a chair. "How I should like it for my bureau!"

Kitty looked at Rob, and Rob looked at Kitty. Then Rob said,—

"Now, Amy, you'll have to walk off by yourself round into that other aisle where the pictures are, for a little while, till we come for you."

"Don't look this way," said Kitty.

"No, I won't," said Amy, walking off very willingly.

When Rob and Kitty joined her, Rob was carrying a new package looking suspiciously like the coveted cologne bottle.

Then Rob was found to be yearning for a Brownie rubber stamping outfit, and *he* had to walk off down another aisle; and when Kitty was seized with violent admiration of a tiny china cup and saucer "too sweet for anything," *she* had to go off down another aisle. So everything was managed with the greatest secrecy and satisfaction.

Going down Race Street, it was hard to drag Rob past Empson's show-window, where were displayed the most tempting candies that ever made the mouth of mortal boy to water. But the girls, though they too yearned for the candy, found that their money was already running low, and insisted on pushing on.

Even after encountering the fascinations of the Japanese Store, where they could buy so many beautiful things for five and ten cents that it was almost impossible to choose among them, they still saved some money for the Five-Cent Store.

At the Five-Cent Store, they meant to purchase some toys to add to those already collected for the Colored Orphans. It was beyond belief how far even twenty-five cents would go at the Five-Cent Store. The children purchased on the safe rule of buying what they would like themselves. Rob laid out his balance in marbles and tops, whips and whistles; Kitty and Amy theirs in sets of dolls' dishes, little barrels of dolls' clothes-pins, and the like.

"Let's get some of these funny black dolls," said Kitty. "They're so cheap, and we could have such fun dressing them up in gay colors."

"No," said Amy. "I'm afraid the orphans would think they were personal. It might hurt their feelings."

"So it might. I didn't think of that," said Kitty. "Let's get some of these cunning little weighing scales, then."

Luckily, in the middle of the day, when the children took the car for home, it was not crowded, for their arms were piled so full of packages of all sorts and sizes, that to stand would have been wellnigh impossible. They had a full sense of their own importance, walking up Hillside Avenue, with Ronald, Jack, Victor, Dixon, and others of the small fry pursuing them, crying, —

"Oh, what have you got? Let me see, Amy. Show 'em to me, Rob?"

"No, sir," said Rob, stalking proudly on. "Get down, Duke; you'll make me drop something," to Duke, who was jumping all over him for joy at his return.

"Oh, I'm so hungry, mamma," said Amy, as she tumbled all her packages into the big armchair in the hall.

"Well you may be," said her mother, who had been watching at the bay-window for the last half-hour, privately resolving never to let Amy go into the city again accompanied only by children. "It is two o'clock."

After eating her luncheon, Amy opened her packages, spread the contents out on her bed, and called her mother to come and admire her wonderful bargains. Certainly never did money give the spender more pleasure than that which the children had expended in their Christmas shopping.

CHAPTER XII.

MERRY CHRISTMAS.

THE week before Christmas was always a hurried one for Amy. There were so many friends she loved, for each of whom she wanted to make some present. Christmas would not have been Christmas to Amy if she could not have made each of these friends a present. But in spite of all her industry beforehand, the last week was sure to be crowded. The library was "a spectacle," as Mrs. Strong said, with the contents of all Amy's piece bags and boxes, silk and velvet bits, ribbons, etc., strewn about; while the professor complained that his desk had become useless to himself, the rightful proprietor, so cumbered was it with Amy's painting materials, and unfinished calendars, picture-frames, and what not.

"I must say, I shall be glad when Christmas is over," he said one night, rather impatiently.

The professor was a son of the Puritans, brought up in old Massachusetts, and never had a Christmas gift in his life until he was almost forty years old. Christmas was unknown in his youth, save as a Popish observance kept by some of the "Episcopalers;" and even yet the professor was hardly fully converted to its merits.

"Papa does n't dream what a nice present he is going to have from somebody, does he, mamma?" said

Amy, looking up from her painting significantly at her mother.

"Pshaw! sheer nonsense, the whole of it," said papa, but looking rather pleased, after all, and in better humor.

"No one must look into my bottom bureau drawer," continued Amy. "Don't you remember, mamma, how Philip used to tease me when he was at home, pretending he couldn't wait to see his present, and was going to peep into my drawer? How I used to scream and chase him about! How nice Philip is! And how I do want to see Gladys! If she is half as pretty as her picture, she must be lovely. Do you think they will really come home this spring, mamma?"

"Yes, they expect to, if nothing happens to change their plans."

"How soon will you pack the box for my nieces, mamma?"

Amy was the proud aunt of two darling baby nieces in Boston, Sydney's children. She felt her importance over the other children on the avenue, in being "a real aunt," and often talked of "my nieces," whom she never yet had seen.

"I will do it up now," said her mother, "if your things are ready."

"Oh, goody!" said Amy. "Yes; Sydney's calendar's all dry now, and I only have to put a ribbon into Faith's picture-frame. I'll run upstairs and bring down the other things."

"Don't run upstairs, Amy," said her mother. "It's bad for you. Walk. There is time enough."

"Oh, I can't walk, I feel so excited," said Amy. "I do think Christmas is splendid."

Away she flew, coming back laden with such an odd collection of things that both she and her mother laughed when they were all piled on the sofa. Among the rest were two rag dolls, so natural they looked like real babies, and two rattles made by Amy, of bells attached to bright ribbons which were wound around a stick; a wonderful spotted brown and white pony, more natural than life, attached to a small cart, charming picture-books, a rabbit that wound up and ran all around the room, and other toys, besides all the things for Sydney and Faith, his wife.

"Don't they look cunning and babyish?" said Amy. "It makes me want to see my nieces so much. Do you think we shall go to Boston this summer, mamma?"

"I can't tell yet," said Mrs. Strong, "It is an expensive journey, and I don't know whether we can afford it this year."

"I shall be perfectly happy if I can only go to Boston," said Amy, decidedly.

"I don't believe I can ever get all these things into this box," said Mrs. Strong, who was struggling with the box.

This was the annual Christmas despair. But, as usual, all the things were crammed into the box somehow; and all the other bundles were done up and sent off, by express and mail, to Philip and Gladys, to all the uncles and aunts, to the cousins in Nebraska and Philadelphia, to Aunt Lou in Pittsburg, and so on.

The poor postman now came, bending beneath such a load of packages that he looked as if he might be Santa Claus in person,—packages that were at once smuggled into Mrs. Strong's closet, because she and

Amy had agreed that no packages were to be opened until Christmas morning.

"Then we will simply wallow in packages," said Amy.

Finally, the "night before Christmas," so anxiously awaited on Hillside Avenue by the army of children, actually came. At dusk, Amy ran about, leaving mysterious bundles at Cousin Elizabeth's, at Kitty's and Irene's and Laura's, meeting on the way Kitty and Irene and Laura, also carrying, with much mystery and secrecy, various packages. When the door-bell rang, Amy was on the alert; but so was Nora too, hiding everything behind her, and hastening with it up into Mrs. Strong's room, not even letting Amy peep at the outside, which Amy said was "too bad," although she really enjoyed all the mystery and excitement.

As soon as dinner was over, Amy hastened to bring down the stockings, and hang them in place. Papa's respectable gray sock, pinned to mamma's long black stocking, was hung over the back of two chairs placed together; while Amy pinned two of her stockings together to hang up. Then she put her presents for her father and mother into and on their stockings and chairs, making them promise not to look. This important business done, Amy tried to read, but at eight o'clock said,—

"I believe I'll go to bed now."

"You do not look at all sleepy," said her mother, smiling at the bright, shining eyes.

"I can't wait for it to be morning," said Amy. "I want to go to bed to make it come sooner."

After Amy had been in bed about an hour, Mrs. Strong said,—

“I’m sure Amy must be asleep. I think I can safely venture to bring down her things now. I want to get off to bed soon myself, for we are sure to be wakened early to-morrow morning.”

She went upstairs and began collecting as quietly as possible the presents and packages that had been hidden away in all sorts of corners. But do her best, there would be a creaking of doors and drawers, a rattling of papers; and presently from Amy’s room came the call,—

“Mamma!”

“Dear me!” said Mrs. Strong, turning up Amy’s gas, and looking in dismay at the very wide-open eyes shining from Amy’s pillow, “is it possible you are not asleep yet?”

“I can’t go to sleep, I’m so excited,” said Amy. “I wish you would come and lie down by me for a little while. Perhaps I could go to sleep then.”

“I will,” said her mother, “as soon as I have arranged all the things.”

“All?” said Amy. “Then there must be a great many.”

“You will soon know now,” said Mrs. Strong, smiling. “Lie still and try to go to sleep.”

She smiled again, as she surveyed the gifts, after her work was done. A modest pile of articles graced her own chair, chiefly Amy’s gifts, a still smaller pile the professor’s; while two stockings crammed full, and two chairs piled high, hardly held all the things for Amy. Then she went into Amy’s room, and lay down beside her excited little girl.

When Amy still slept in the crib beside her mother, if restless, she used to beg the privilege of getting over into "the sweet mother-love bed," as she called it. And now, as her mother lay by her, gradually the sense of the brooding mother-love quieted the restless brain, stilled the quick breathing into long, deep breaths, and Amy was at last fast asleep, even if it were Christmas Eve.

In spite of going to sleep later than usual, she was the first person awake in the house.

"Merry Christmas, papa! Merry Christmas, mamma!" woke the professor and his wife in the gray of the early morning.

"Merry Christmas, Amy," came rather drowsily from papa and mamma. Then they looked at each other and laughed.

"I guess I will go down and light the gas for her, as she is up and dressed," said the professor, beginning to dress.

"What time is it?" asked Mrs. Strong.

"Just six."

"I may as well get up, too," said Mrs. Strong. "I shall not go to sleep again."

In truth, both wanted to see Amy's joy over her presents. They hurried downstairs, to find the library a surging sea of brown paper and string, and Amy in the midst, in an ecstasy of delight over all her gifts.

"I thank you so much, papa, for 'The Leather Stocking Series,'" said Amy. "I know I shall just revel in them. And that box of fancy paper, mamma, was exactly what I wanted."

Mrs. Strong smiled, this was so characteristic

of Amy, who was always satisfied with what she received, not a bit spoiled, if she were an only daughter.

Amy was now digging down toward the toe of her stocking. She knew that her mother usually put some jokelet in the toe of her stocking ; so when she brought up from the depths a small square package, she laughed and looked at her mother, saying, —

“I know what this is.”

“This is something different from what you expect,” said Mrs. Strong.

“Oh, oh, o-o-h !” now exclaimed Amy. For the little package contained a paper box, on the outside of which was inscribed, “Duhme and Co. ;” and inside was the prettiest silver watch and chain, Amy thought, that she had ever seen.

“Look inside the case, Amy,” said her mother.

Opening the case, there was an inscription, — “Amy, from Grandma.”

Then Mrs. Strong told Amy that her grandmother, who had died the previous autumn, soon after her return from a summer in her old Massachusetts home, had requested that a watch be bought for Amy as her last Christmas present from grandma.

Tears came in Amy’s eyes. She said, —

“I shall always keep it, as long as I live, to remember grandma by.”

The corners of a little square bundle gave the other stocking an odd shape. This bundle proved to be a dollar camera.

“This is what I wanted the most of anything,” said Amy. Rob had one of these cameras, and Irene ; and Amy longed to try her skill at taking photographs.

Professor Strong had stood all this time, tall and smiling, looking down from his height on Amy's raptures.

"Papa has n't even opened his presents yet," said Amy, surprised that her father could take matters so coolly. "Please, papa, look at your presents."

Thus implored, her father, with a quizzical smile, took up a large bundle, on the outside of which was written, "Papa Strong, from his loving little daughter, Amy." Opening it, there was a nightshirt!

"Why, is it possible that you made this, Amy?"

"Yes, indeed I did, almost every stitch of it, except the button-holes, did n't I, mamma?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Strong; "Amy really worked very hard on it. She said she knew papa liked useful presents."

The professor looked greatly pleased. He held the garment up, and examined it critically all over. Some of the stitches were a trifle long, perhaps; but that only made it more precious, because they showed the hand of the loving child, toiling to give papa pleasure.

"This is a very nice present, Amy," said the professor; "and I shall prize it highly, because you made it yourself."

Mamma's turn to be surprised came next, when she found a pretty white apron for herself, also made by Amy.

"Why, Amy," she said, "how did you manage to make this, and keep it secret from me?"

"Mrs. Clover bought it for me with my own money," said Amy, "and I sewed on it over at Cousin Elizabeth's. She showed me about it."

There was also a painted calendar for papa, and a tiny Japanese bowl, bought with Amy's money, for mamma. Amy had worked hard to make a happy Christmas for her friends, and now their pleasure was the best part of her own Christmas joy.

Amy had many friends, and each had sent her something. When all the packages were at last opened, and she had arranged the gifts on the library table, it was full, and really a brilliant spectacle, with its many bright and dainty and shining things. Amy was as pleased with the little gifts, that stood for some friend's love, as with the more costly. She hovered over the table in a distracted way, like a butterfly over a flower-bed, lighting now on this, now on that.

"I think this court-plaster case Cousin Emma made for me is so pretty," she said; "and how kind it was of Mrs. White to make me a needle-book. Oh, mamma, you have n't seen this book that Mr. Kinsmont gave me."

Mr. Kinsmont was a young gentleman friend of the family, who was very kind to Amy. Mrs. Strong took up the book, quite a large one, and read, with a frown of disapproval, the title, "Cupid's Quiver."

"A very singular book to give a little girl," she said frigidly.

How Amy laughed! for the book, a miracle of deception, opened, proved to be a box of choicest candies.

"I do pity the Clovers so!" said Amy, when at last the excitement had subsided sufficiently to admit of their sitting down to breakfast.

"Why so?" asked her father, surprised, for the Clovers had never struck him as objects of compassion.

"They are not allowed to look at their presents until after breakfast. I should think they would die. Their presents are all in the library; and the door is kept shut until after breakfast, and no one even allowed to peep in. Kitty said that last year, after breakfast, her father formed them all in a procession in order of age, Rob first and his mother last, and marched them all around the house, upstairs and down, just to tease them, before he let them into the library."

Grimm's Fairy Tales had come by mail, and several other books, besides those from Amy's father and mother. After breakfast, piling all her new books up near by, with Mr. Kinsmont's box of candy within easy reach, Amy ensconced herself in her favorite seat,—the big armchair before her father's desk, by the window that looked down toward the big elms in the hollow,—and prepared to give herself up to perfect happiness.

"Do you expect to read all those books at once, Amy?" asked her father.

"No, papa; but it makes me feel so rich to have them all about me. I love to revel in them;" and Amy proceeded to "revel" in Grimm until she heard Kitty's light footsteps running up the back steps, and, in a moment more, Kitty herself popped into the room, her brown eyes big with excitement.

"Oh, Amy," she said, "you must come right over and see our things. I have a pink silk dress for dancing-school!"

"How lovely!" exclaimed Amy, with almost a twinge of envy.

"Yes, and a new sled, very big, and, oh, lots of things! And Rob has a printing-press and a little telephone."

"Oh, has he?" said Amy. "I'll be right over."

But first Kitty must stop and admire Amy's presents. Then Amy went to see Kitty and Rob's treasures. Then they all went down to see Irene's gifts, and Irene came back with them to see their things; and then Frida Goldschmidt came running over to ask them all to come to her house and see her Christmas tree; and finally they went down to Cousin Elizabeth's, where the small Ronald, Jack, and Phyllis were almost buried in a sea of presents. Evidently Santa Claus had received Jack's letter. He had been much helped in his good work by some uncles and aunts in Washington, whose big box was always one of the features of the Neales' Christmas. Cousin Elizabeth's back parlor looked like a bazaar, and sounded as if a menagerie had broken loose in it, with all the children trying all the new toys at once. By this time it was noon, and high time to dress for dinner, especially as the Strongs were to have as guests some old friends,—Dr. and Mrs. Hough, and Judge and Mrs. White.

It had been arranged that the Brightside clubs should make their gifts to the Colored Orphans at four o'clock on Christmas Day. The members of the clubs met at Mrs. Herndon's; and a little before four quite a procession of girls and boys set forth for Brook Street, laden with baskets and bundles. Whatever children set out in earnest to do, generally comes

to pass; and the amount of things the Brightside members had managed to collect for the orphans was surprising,— nice things, too, sure to please the children.

The Colored Orphan Asylum was a rickety, rambling old building, standing on the heights of Brook Street. Sometime the trustees hoped to raise money for the new building so sorely needed. But the institution was poor, chiefly supported by the donations of the hard-working colored people of Cincinnati, so here, for want of a better place, forty homeless children were sheltered and trained in good habits until able to care for themselves.

The club found the orphans, dressed in their Sunday best, all shining with soap and expectance, gathered in the dining-room, where still lingered the savory odors of the nice turkey dinner, to which Mrs. Strong and other mothers had contributed. The orphans eyed the big baskets, and the Brightsiders eyed the orphans. Then the superintendent gave them a great surprise by saying,—

“We have prepared a few exercises to entertain our kind young friends.”

A variety of recitations followed, and singing by the colored children. The Brightsiders were greatly entertained, and realized that virtue brings unexpected rewards sometimes. They were especially amused by the infant class of six tiny girls, four or five years old.

“Did you ever see anything so cunning as those little girls ?” whispered Amy.

“No,” said Kitty. “I’m so glad there are dolls enough to go around.”

The little girls’ hair was braided in pigtails a half-

finger long, standing out from their heads at unusual angles, and tied with bright tags of ribbon, in great variety of color. They enjoyed their own singing immensely, rolling their big eyes comically, and showing all their gleaming white teeth as they shouted out their melodies. One would hardly have believed that six such little bodies could hold such a volume of sound. Especially did they let themselves out on the chorus:—

“*Down came the angels,
And took her soul away!*”

This almost split the hearers’ ears every time, and was sung with a broad grin of delight, as if it were the merriest thought imaginable.

Although gratified with the impression they were evidently making on their guests, the orphans were visibly bursting with impatience before the superintendent finally brought the exercises to a close, and said,—

“Now let us have perfect order, and our kind young friends will distribute the gifts they have brought us.”

A great moment this, both for the orphans and the Brightsiders. It was hard to tell which enjoyed it most. The bundles of clothing were given to the superintendent, who said that everything was sure to be acceptable, as nothing ever came amiss where there were forty active children to be clothed. Elliot and Rob had tugged over a basket containing four dozen oranges that Mrs. Carman had contributed. The older boys passed these around, while the smaller boys distributed the candy-bags and nuts, and the girls gave out the dolls and other toys.

Mrs. Strong had learned the children's ages, so there was an appropriate toy for each child, besides a candy-bag, an orange, and nuts. The rapture of the six little girls with their six little dolls was pleasant to see. They hugged the precious dollies closely, and looked as if they thought "the angels" had come down in good earnest in the persons of Amy, Kitty, Laura, and Irene,—the little girls who looked so sweet and happy in making others happy.

When Amy went to bed that night, she said to her mother,—

"It has been such a happy day. I think I ought to be a very happy little girl, with so many kind friends, and I am, too;" and she put more than usual fervor into the little prayer of her own that always followed "Our Father,"—a prayer for "all those I love."

Under all Amy's brightness and capacity for play and fun, lay a deep and real religious trust. She felt that God was her friend, to whose loving-kindness she owed all that made life so pleasant. When only nine years old, she had a great trial to undergo. At that time, she wrote out, with much effort, this "poem," as she called it, as really religious as many a hymn, representing, as it did, the child's real faith.

The poem was called —

THE LORD.

The Lord is great.
The Lord is
Good.
He always helps
Us out of
Our troubles.

He hears each wrong.
He hears each
Act of good.
He watches
Over us at night,
And watches o'er
At day.
He loves
Us with
A father's heart.
And now
When we lay
Our heads
Down upon
Our pillows
Soft,
We must
Not forget
To thank Him
For His
Loving eye
That
Watches through the
Sun and rain for
Ever with a loving
Eye, in sunshine and in rain.

CHAPTER XIII.

“FUN” IN THE SNOW.

IT was counted a special piece of good luck by all the Hillside Avenue children, that the first snow of the winter should happen to come in the Christmas holidays, when they could improve it to the utmost, and when so many new sleds were burning to be used. It was a real up-and-down snow-storm, too; not one of those pretenders, so common in Cincinnati, with snow enough to whiten the ground and raise the hopes of all the girls and boys, only to turn into a disappointing rain and slush. It began in the evening, and snowed fast all night. The next morning, Amy was awakened first by Kitty’s well-known—

“Pur-r-r-r!”

Then something hit her window. Opening her sleepy eyes, she saw remnants of a snowball still clinging to her window toward the Clovers.

“Oh, it must have been snowing!” thought she, wide awake at once, jumping out of bed and running to the window. “Oh, how beautiful! It looks as if an enchanter had waved his wand while we were all asleep, and made a white world!”

Soft white snow weighed down the spruce-trees, covered the elm boughs, and hung on all the familiar roofs. The clouds were just parting, and the sun broke out in dazzling brightness, glancing and spark-

ling on the snow crystals. Kitty and Rob, armed with brooms, their cheeks red and glowing with exercise, were out valiantly sweeping the paths. Not that this was necessary, for the Clovers' colored man would attend to that; but they wanted to. Mr. Green, his shovel, and his dogs were already out, making Professor Strong's paths.

Kitty soon spied Amy's head peeping through her curtain's folds.

"Amy, you sleepy head," she called, "how can you be asleep with such a snow as this? Rob and I have been out ever so long."

"Is n't it splendid?" said Amy. "Duke likes it, does n't he?"

"He does now; but he did n't at first, you'd better believe," said Rob. "He never saw snow before, you know, and at first he was afraid of it. He would n't come out of his house,—just sat in his door and howled. Finally I pulled him out. Now he finds it does n't hurt him, he thinks it as much fun as anybody else."

Duke was running up and down, barking at the snow, biting it, and white all over where Kitty and Rob had swept snow on him.

"Hurry up and get down here, Amy," said Kitty.

"I'll be down in a minute," said Amy.

But she could not resist opening her window, and making bird-tracks in the fresh snow all over the porch roof as far as she could reach out. Then she drew a giant face on the roof in the snow with her forefinger, writing "Amy Strong" underneath, with great flourishes; but after breakfast she put on her rubber boots, hunted up her sled, and hastened to join the other children.

Hillside Avenue was alive from one end to the other. The children, big and little, were all out with their sleds; and the clear, cold air resounded with their merry shouts and laughter. Amy, Kitty, Rob, Elliot, and some of the others made a sliding track down the Strong's hillside to the brook. The hillside was steep, and the track all the better because they must make a skilful turn toward the bottom to avoid going into the brook. Here the children dashed down, and toiled and tugged up again untiringly.

Duke seemed to think the whole performance was expressly for his benefit, and chased the flying sleds, barking wildly, and sometimes catching hold of a boy's overcoat or a girl's cloak with his teeth.

After dinner, the coasters mostly gathered at Dr. Trimble's, the best coasting place on the street, where the big boys had made a long track, with a "thank-ye-ma'am" in the middle, that sent those able to stick to their sleds flying off across a long valley at the foot of the hill. Now and then sleds bumped into each other, or some one rolled off at the "thank-ye-ma'am," but no one was hurt, and these accidents only made more fun.

Amy came in to the dinner-table at night tired indeed, but rosy and hungry, full of talk, telling her father and mother all about the sport.

"One of the funniest things," said Amy, "was to see the little Posey boys. They started all right at the top of the hill; but as they didn't know how to steer, their sleds would turn around, and there they would be, their short legs sticking straight out, going down backwards or sidewise, sometimes, but just as well satisfied, thinking they were coasting the same

as any one. Some of the big boys said they were in the way, and tried to drive them off; but we big girls defended them, and said they had as good a right there as we. Isn't it too bad? Ronald was n't out coasting to-day, and Jack says he is sick. I must go down to see him."

"Indeed you must not," said her mother. "I have had a note from your Cousin Elizabeth. The doctor has just been there, and pronounces it a case of scarlet fever. You will have to keep entirely away from the house, Amy."

"Poor Ronald!" said Amy. "I am so sorry for him. I will write him a little letter, anyway, and get Mr. Green to leave it there."

That evening, tired and sleepy though she was, Amy wrote a funny letter to Ronald, illustrated with gayly painted pictures scattered through it, representing the coasters, the boys tumbling off their sleds, and the funny accident that happened to Duke, when, in hot chase of a dead leaf that was blowing down-hill over the snow, he slipped and went rolling down to the bottom.

Every day or two, during Ronald's illness, Amy sent him one of these bright little letters, taxing her ingenuity to invent something new, some little surprise for each one. When he was better, and able to care for amusement, though still confined to his room, she went up to Miss Blau's remarkable store, where five cents was quite a fortune, and bought him rows of paper soldiers, Indians, and other toys not too expensive to be burned when he was well.

These little gifts and letters were great events to the little sick boy, eagerly expected, and brightening

the weary sick-room not a little. One letter that Ronald thought very funny, after describing what the children had been playing, ended,—

“And then we all went away.”

Under this was drawn a funny row of children’s feet, walking and running away.

The thing that Ronald prized most, and was most sorry to have burned when he recovered, was “The family of King Spool.”

Amy gathered a number of empty spools, of various sizes. On these she drew and painted funny faces, all of different expression. The kings and lords had elegant crowns of gilt paper pasted on their heads, while the young ladies wore caps of bright-hued tissue paper, with sashes of baby ribbon to match. “King Spool” himself was the largest spool, and looked as if he fully realized his own importance. “Lord Wellcontent” and “Lord Doleful-dismal” were the greatest possible contrast in expression; “Miss Satisfidalia” looked well pleased with herself, “Miss Flyaway” very giddy, and “Little Tootsy Wootsy” was a twist spool, made to resemble a fat, roly-poly baby.

Ronald, who was a child of much imagination, received the Spool family as his choicest gift; and King Spool held high court every day in his box on Ronald’s bed.

Amy’s heart was full of kind impulses. Only the winter before, when Ned Herndon had died of the diphtheria, and little Claribel, who had been sick almost unto death, was slowly recovering, Amy had devised a most ingenious amusement for her. The Herndons lived opposite the Strongs; and when little

Claribel at last began to recover, Amy could plainly see the thin, white face at the chamber window opposite, peeping out so wistfully, just above the window-sill, at the children playing on the street.

"I do feel so sorry for poor little Claribel," she said one day as she came in from school. "I'm going to get up a show for her."

"How can you?" asked Mrs. Strong. "Of course I could not think of letting you go over there yet."

"Oh, you'll see, by-and-by," said Amy, laughing.

She was shut up in her own room at work a long time, then called her mother to come and see the results. She had decorated her double front window facing the Herndons with all sorts of brightnesses,—tiny flags, and festoons of bright colored tissue-paper chains, that she had learned to make at kindergarten long ago. Across the sill were sitting and standing a row of dolls.

"Isn't it funny?" said Amy. "Now I'm going to run down and see if it shows outside, and if Claribel can see it."

She dashed downstairs, and out on the sidewalk, her long golden hair flying out as it always did when Amy ran. Then she waved her hand to Claribel, who was eagerly looking at the wonderful display opposite, and scampered back again.

"Yes," she said; "you can see it as plainly as possible. I can tell old Dinah, and Lord Fauntleroy, and Violet, and Undine, and all of them. People going by will think we keep a doll store here, I guess."

Amy changed the window exhibit every few days; and Claribel, who loved dolls, found endless diversion in watching Amy's shows, and wondering what would

come next. Amy's greatest triumph was a gigantic paper doll. On a sarsaparilla calendar, she found the head of a little girl, life size, and brightly colored. She pasted this to a body that she cut out, so long that she had to lie down on the floor to paint it. When hung up in her window, this triumph of art filled the whole lower sash, from top to bottom, and could not be sufficiently admired by Claribel.

When coasting had become an old story,—that is, when the track on Dr. Trimble's hill had become so worn that the very turf would bear its mark long after the snow had vanished,—a mania for snow forts and images seized upon the Hillside Avenue children. Things always went in waves among them. If one did a thing, all wanted to do it. So now snow parapets arose all along the avenue, until one might have thought that an invading army was expected, and that the avenue was prepared to shed its last drop of blood in defence. The best fort was on the Clovers' lawn; and well it might be, for the Clovers, Amy, Irene, Elliot, Paul, Ben, and the rest worked hard and long to build it, rolling great snowballs, and piling them up, until the fort was quite imposing in height, and a capital place for defence. Snowballs flew, and battles raged fiercely, around this fort.

One Saturday morning, Mrs. Strong's attention was attracted by an unusual noise at her stable. Looking out, she found that the seat of war had shifted from the fort to her stable. The girls, who had been defending the fort against the attack of the boys, hard pushed by the enemy, had taken refuge in the upper story of the stable. The upper door, for stowing away hay, was slightly ajar. The front

of the stable was plastered all over with snowballs ; and the air was white with them, if the girls so much as ventured to peep out the door.

As Mrs. Strong stood wondering whether the snowballs would break the stable window, and whether she ought to interfere, the boys, growing wilder with excitement, dashed in on the lower floor of the stable, laid hands on Professor Strong's sacred pile of kindling (that he liked to split himself for exercise), dashed out, and began to throw kindling-wood up at the girls' fortress. Now Mrs. Strong stepped quickly out on her back porch and cried,—

“Boys, boys ! I am surprised. That's carrying the war into Africa too earnestly. You must stop that.”

At this attack in the rear, the boys suspended hostilities a moment ; and Paul Williams, who always took things literally, said,—

“No, Mrs. Strong, we're not carrying the war into Africa ; we're fighting the girls. They don't play fair ; and Kitty Clover put a snowball down my neck.”

The upper door swung open now, framing a bright, pretty picture of merry girl-faces, blue eyes and black eyes, golden locks and brown, as Amy, Irene, Kitty, Laura, May Morgan, and Janet, all peeped out over each other's shoulders, rosy and laughing.

“Well,” said Mrs. Strong, “please replace my kindling-wood, and then go elsewhere to settle your difficulties. Amy, come in now. Luncheon is ready.”

The boys, by way of revenge on the girls, went back to the fort and kicked to pieces its already shattered remains, which mattered little, as the in-

creasing warmth of the weather was rapidly thawing and softening what the furious battles waged around it had spared of its once proud battlements, and the gathering clouds and thickening grayness of the air promised speedy rain.

Soon after luncheon, the rain came down in driving torrents. For a wonder, no children came in to see Amy; but she, as always when alone, was perfectly happy with her own inventions. She was working hard on her mother's type-writer, her slender fingers fairly hopping from key to key.

“What are you doing now, Amy?” asked her mother, noting this industry.

“I'm making out the catalogue of the boarding-school I'm going to have up in the attic. I'll show it to you when it is done.”

Amy worked away, laughing to herself now and then, as she added some new bombastic phrase. When done, it seemed to Mrs. Strong not a bad burlesque of some real school catalogues she had seen. It was highly ornamented on the outside with flourishes and designs in color, and an occasional misspelled word only added to the general effect. The catalogue said:—

MISS AMY STRONG,

at her famous school for Young Ladies, will give lessons in french and other accomplishments. Among them are

Drawing.	Stocking Darning.
Music.	Painting.
Poetry.	Story writing.
Composition.	Gymnastics.
Sewing.	Dancing.
Cooking.	

1. French is her principal instruction. She has had great advantages, in the shape of instruction from a native of the higher class. Terms are moderate.
2. Drawing lessons are given in an easy but satisfiable method. Low rates.
3. Music both of guitar and piano are brought under the fortunate pupils' notice.
4. For Poetry she is an universally acnoledged instructress.
5. She has had great advantages in the compository line.
6. Sewing is an old fashioned but useful accomplishment which no lady should be without. Miss Strong's sewing is noted for its neatness, beauty, and sensibility. It is always a worthy occupation.
7. Cooking is an accomplishment which every lady, young or old, should be master of. Miss Strong's lessons in it are always sensible and useful. She considers the art of bread-making the highest triumph a cook can have. She considers that **GOOD BREAD** is the hardest thing a young cook can attempt.
8. Stocking Darning is payed great attention to. Miss Strong estimates it on the same standered as the list of accomplishments.
9. Painting is a beautiful accomplishment. However, none but the truly skilled should attempt it. They only can make it a success. Daubers are never admired. Those who possess the **REAL** talent are lucky indeed.
10. Story-Writing is indeed a wonderful accomplishment. It is the same as with painting, however. None except with true talent should venture.
11. Gymnastics is a healthy, graceful accomplishment, which no one should neglect. It promotes a good carriage, good health, and good temper.
12. Dancing is a graceful accomplishment, and a pleasant resource.

These fine arts are taught by Miss Amy Strong at her new boarding school. Miss Strong politely solicets the

public patronage. Arrangements can be made about the prices, which are always reasonable and moderate.

Miss Strong's address is,

Miss AMY STRONG,
Edgeton,
Cincinnati,
Hamilton Co.
Ohio,
United States,
America,
Western Hemisphere,
On the Earth,
In the Universe,
In Space !

“I was not aware that you held stocking-darning in such high esteem,” said her mother, laughing. “Your address is certainly very full and explicit.”

“Is n’t it funny?” said Amy. “Now we can begin the boarding-school whenever the girls come over. But I’m going to write out a story now that I have been making up in my mind nights, after I go to bed.”

“You ought to go to sleep,” said her mother, “instead of composing stories.”

“I do,” said Amy. “It helps me go to sleep to compose a story. My mind is all full of pleasant thoughts; and then I glide off into dreams before I know it.”

Amy seated herself in her favorite place, at her father’s desk, and her fingers were soon flying as fast as pencil could scratch, jotting down this tale: —

THE ROMANCE OF CASTLE SPIRENDOFF.

Castle Spirendoff was situated among wild and wooded mountains, but nevertheless it was always full of guests, for any one who had seen the beautiful Lady Spirendoff's picture was willing to risk the numerous dangers of the mountains to spend a month or two at her noble castle, for she was then one of the most beautiful and virtuous female celebrities living.

Hark! Did you hear that? It was a trumpet announcing the coming of another guest up the mountain side.

Imogen the beautiful hears it also, as she sits among her maids. Let us glance at her before we continue our narrative.

Her room is hung and carpeted with silken tapestries, the soft colors worked in a way that makes them look as if they had melted into each other, they blend so harmonizingly, and harmonize so softly.

From these lofty scenes Amy was called down to common life again by the dashing in of Kitty, the waterproof over her head all sprinkled with rain-drops.

"Oh, Amy," she exclaimed, out of breath with hurry and excitement, "what do you think? Rob has put his telephone up!"

"Oh, has he? Where?" asked Amy, all interest at once.

"Mrs. Bruce was so kind, — you know she always is, — she let him run it over into her attic from ours. Rob and Elliot and Paul and Ben have been working at it all the afternoon, and now it works splendidly. Ben just said, 'Hello, Rob,' over in his attic, and we heard it as plain as could be. Then Rob telephoned back, 'Hello, Booby,' — you know the boys call Ben that sometimes, for fun, — and Ben called right back,

‘Quit that now, d’ ye hear?’ It’s such fun. Come right over and try it.”

Amy needed no urging, but slipped on her water-proof, and ran over to Kitty’s, forgetting for the time the splendors of Castle Spirendoff. When she came back, she asked,—

“ May I spend the evening at the Clovers’, mamma? Mrs. Clover wants me to.”

Although Amy was perfectly happy when alone, no one ran faster or played harder than she, once out with the other children. Her mother was always glad when the play side of Amy’s nature was uppermost,—anything to keep the busy little brain quiet. To-night, being apprehensive of the “Romance of Castle Spirendoff,” she gladly said,—

“ Yes, you may go; and when it is time for you to come home, I will come in after you.”

When Mrs. Strong went into the Clovers’, about half-past eight, she thought pandemonium had broken loose in the Clovers’ second story, such a noise was going on there,—such a jumping and howling and barking and chasing about. Mrs. Clover looked as sweet and serene as usual. When the children spent an evening at Amy’s, they had to play “Messenger Boy” and “Authors” and “Logomachy” and similar quiet games, because the professor was always studying or reading, and Mrs. Strong reading, and they liked quiet. But an evening at the Clovers’ was a different affair. In the first place, Mrs. Clover had no nerves,—that is, of the troublesome kind,—and never had headaches. A little noise, more or less, never worried her. Then, being the mother of a lively, wide-awake boy, who must, of course, some-

times have his boy friends in to play with him, she was well seasoned to noise.

On Mrs. Strong's remarking, "I'm afraid that's some game of Amy's invention. She has a faculty of devising new games that require to be carried out on a large scale, upturning the whole house. The noise must annoy you."

"Not at all," said Mrs. Clover, pleasantly. "Some of Rob's friends have dropped in this evening, and that always helps the noise a good deal. I can stand the noise, so long as they are doing nothing wrong. Noisy play is usually innocent play."

Through the babel, Amy was finally made to hear that her mother had come for her, and ran down stairs with wildly tangled locks but glowing cheeks, crying, "Good-night, Kitty; good-night, Rob. Good-night, everybody," to the other children, whose laughing, flushed faces peeped over the balustrade above, as they shouted a chorus of cheerful "Good-nights."

Amy came home full of talk about the fun they had been having, and entertained her mother by telling all about it, while she was brushing the tangles out of Amy's hair, and otherwise helping her prepare for bed. Amy liked her mother's company while she was undressing. "It seems so much cosier and more family-ish to have some one to talk to," she said; so bedtime was always the time for confidences.

"At first," said Amy, "there were only Kitty and Rob and I, and we sat down in 'the Den' upstairs, and told each other such a funny 'Rigmarole' story. Kitty began it. Rob had a set of books about African adventures last Christmas, you know, so Kitty was full of that. She began,—

“Once upon a time, there was a party of six travellers going into the heart of Africa. The travellers were Mr. Brown, his secretary, and four natives; they were all armed, for they knew it was a very dangerous country, full of fierce wild animals and savages.”

“After various thrilling adventures, she had an enormous white gorilla come walking out of the woods on his hind legs, seize one of the natives, crunch and eat him on the spot. Then Rob took up the story. Rob made them have terrible times. They were attacked by a large band of savages, and had a desperate battle, so that the ground was red with blood all around. They were tremendously brave, and finally escaped, all but one native who was killed by the savages, who also succeeded in capturing all their guns and revolvers. Then they started on their way again, when an immense serpent, twice as large as any at the Zoo, Rob said, swung down out of a palm-tree, wound himself around another poor native, crushed all his bones, and swallowed him whole. Mr. Brown would have shot the serpent; but he had no revolver, so of course he could n’t.

“Now it was my turn to take up the story. There were only left Mr. Brown, his secretary, and one native. I thought it was time to end them up. I had the three who were left riding on an elephant, when suddenly a tiger leaped out of the jungle through which they were passing, seized the last native, pulled him off, and carried him into the jungle and devoured him. Before they had recovered from this shock, they were attacked by a terribly large and fierce lion and lioness. The lion seized the secretary; and they tumbled off the elephant together into a river, and

were both drowned. Mr. Brown had the greatest presence of mind. He seized the elephant goad ; and as the lioness sprang upon him open-mouthed, he thrust the goad down her throat, and kept wriggling it about, which she did not like at all. I hadn't quite decided whether to make Mr. Brown, the last survivor, very brave, and have him conquer everything, and come through all right, or whether it would n't be more tragic to kill him too, when Elliot Carman came in, so I let the lioness eat him right up."

Mrs. Strong was much amused by this story, but said, —

"I should think that was rather too blood-thirsty a story to be pleasant."

"Oh, no ; we liked it. You ought to have seen Rob's and Kitty's eyes stand out when I was telling my part. If I stopped a minute to think, Kitty said, 'Oh, it 's so exciting ! Go on, Amy ; go on, do !'

"Next we played 'Bluebeard.' I was Fatima, Kitty was Sister Anne, Rob was Bluebeard, and Elliot was my brother. Of course it needed two brothers, but I had to get along with one. That was great fun too. I do love to make up games, and to act. When it came to the tragic part, it was very exciting. I threw myself on my knees before Rob, and raised my clasped hands imploringly, and tore my hair, and begged for mercy. And Kitty stood up on the high end of the lounge (that was the tower, you know), and cried for help, and said she saw a great dust in the distance, and then I wailed some more. But Rob was the fiercest Bluebeard you ever saw. He had a bath-towel twisted around his head for a turban, and his father's great ivory paper-knife for a sword, and he brandished it about, and said, —

“‘No, sir-ee. No use talking. Off goes your head this minute.’

“He seized me by the hair, and placed the paper-cutter to my throat, when in burst to the rescue, not only Elliot, but Ben and Paul, who had just come in, so at last I had too many brothers, instead of too few.

“Then Rob proposed that we should play ‘Menagerie ;’ and that was what we were playing when you came in.”

“I should think so,” said her mother. “I never heard such a noise; Mrs. Clover is the kindest, best-natured of women, or she would not endure it.”

“We can do almost anything over at the Clovers,” said Amy. “We were the different wild animals; and of course we had to roar and howl, and prance about. The funniest thing was Rob. He decided to be Daniel in the lion’s den. So he went into the ‘Den,’ and took the big Bible, and sat down to read in it, with all that noise going on,—‘to be good like Daniel,’ he said. Then he decided he had to be one of the lions. So sometimes he was Daniel, and sometimes a lion. Oh, I must tell you such a nice plan that Kitty and I have. Ben and Rob are going to take in printing to do, on their new presses that they had Christmas. They will print calling-cards for us girls at five cents a dozen. And we girls are going to have cards printed with our reception days on them, and go calling on each other.”

“You will always be out playing together,” said her mother. “There will be no chance to call.”

“Oh, yes, there will, for we shall all stay at home on our reception days, of course; and the boys are

going to print a little paper. May I subscribe? It is to be only two cents a number. And oh, I almost forgot to tell you, Elliot Carman says he will give me some bantam chickens if you and papa will let me have them. Do let me. I love pets so, and I only have Prince."

"Subside, child; subside," said her mother, laughing. "No more schemes to-night. You must talk over the chicken plan with papa sometime."

"Sometime' sounds so far away," said Amy. "I want to know right away."

"Lie still now," said her mother; "and I will read a poem to you to calm you, and then you must say your prayers and go to sleep."

CHAPTER XIV.

A BIRTHDAY.

FEBRUARY second is notable in Southern Ohio as "Ground-Hog Day," the ground-hog being the woodchuck of the east. On this day it is understood that the ground-hog comes out of his hole, and brings his wisdom to bear on the weather. If the sun shines so that he sees his shadow, he goes back into winter quarters, for he knows there will be six weeks more of winter. But if the day is cloudy, so that he casts no shadow, he stays out, knowing that winter is over.

Ground-Hog Day this year was cloudy all through ; and the next morning's papers displayed pictures of the ground-hog stripping off his overcoat, and preparing for work. The omen seemed likely to prove true, for even before Valentine's Day the air grew mild and spring-like, and the grass began to show a brighter green. Occasionally there came a cooler spell, and an inch or so of driving snow, that, melting, left the grass brighter than before.

Amy came home from school one day in fine spirits, and entertained her mother, as was her wont, during luncheon, by accounts of the sayings and doings at her beloved school.

"What do you suppose, mamma, Miss Nutting wants us to write about next time ? The topic

is, ‘My Favorite Book.’ Marguerite is going to write about ‘Kenilworth.’ She visited the ruins of Kenilworth while they were abroad; and her mother read the novel aloud to them over there, which made it so interesting. But I am going to write about ‘Pride and Prejudice.’”

“Miss Nutting will perhaps think that an odd book for a little girl to choose.”

“But the characters are so real I feel just as if I knew them. I often draw pictures of them. Mademoiselle is so nice. We are all devoted to her. Marguerite is really in love with her, and Nannie Luxton says she *worships* her. But she makes the girls mind, all the same. This morning, Julia Butler was gnawing the top of her pencil in the French class; and Mademoiselle said to her sarcastically,—

“‘ Vous n’avez pas de déjeuner ce matin, Julie ? ’

“That made us all laugh, and Julia put her pencil in her pocket quickly. When our exercises look smeary and blotty, Mademoiselle’s severe rebuke is, ‘It looks as if a cat had written it.’ Nellie Fuller did such a funny thing to-day. She brought a pencil-sharpener to school, and at recess went around and sharpened the tops of all the girls’ wooden pen-holders. I must get me a pencil-sharpener right away. All the girls have them.”

“Then you cannot get along without one, of course,” said her mother.

“I do like my school so much. Miss Nutting is so nice; and it is so interesting to sit in her room and hear what she says to the girls. She makes even parsing interesting. And I like all my teachers; and we do have such fun up in the gymnasium at recess.

I like all my studies, too, except that horrible arithmetic. Oh, mamma, did you know that I shall be thirteen before long? Only think, I shall be in my teens then; I can't imagine being so old!"

"I can hardly realize it myself," said her mother. "I am almost sorry to have my little girl growing up so fast."

"Will you let me have a party, mamma?"

"As this is such an important birthday, I suppose we shall have to celebrate it," said Mrs. Strong.

Amy's whole mind was now absorbed by the coming party. As often happens to older people, she was in great indecision as to whom to ask. There were so many children on the avenue that it was hard to know where to stop when it came to sending out the invitations. Amy wanted to ask them all; but Mrs. Strong did not feel equal to so large a party as this would make.

"I want to ask Ida Jones, anyway," said Amy, one day, when she and her mother were canvassing their list of guests.

"Why, Amy," said her mother, "I don't think that necessary. Ida is somewhat younger than you, and you have never been specially intimate with her. I think you could omit her."

"No, mamma," said Amy, earnestly; "I don't think it would be kind. She would hear all about the party, and know I asked the other girls and left her out, and feel slighted. I don't think it is kind, and I want to ask her."

"Very well," said her mother, conscious that Amy's instincts were truer than her own in this instance.

For Ida Jones came from a family of lower social position than most of Amy's playmates, and lacked

refinement of manner, which facts Mrs. Strong knew had influenced herself. But Amy's heart was always kind ; and kind hearts are safe social guides, after all. Her mother felt that Amy had showed the better breeding of the two, for —

“ Politeness is to do and say
The kindest thing in the kindest way.”

The all-important list was finally narrowed down to those of Amy's girl friends nearest her age, to her particular friends, the cousins, Marguerite and Theodore, Rob, because he lived next door and was Kitty's brother, and the little cousins, Ronald, Jack, and Phyllis. Even this made a party of about twenty.

The long-suffering postman on the birthday morning left numerous packages addressed to “ Miss Amy Strong ;” for Sydney and Philip and Aunt Lou and Aunt Lois, and many other far-away friends, did not forget the birthday of the little girl that they all loved.

“ How many friends I have, and how kind every one is ! ” said Amy, delighted, as she “ wallowed,” to use her own expression, in opening the packages and exclaimed at their contents.

“ The loving will be loved,” Mrs. Strong thought, but did not say, as she thought how Amy delighted in remembering all her friends' birthdays. Papa's and mamma's especially she made real gala-days, rising earlier than usual to decorate their place at the table with flowers, and to pile up around their plates the little presents she had made them, often accompanied by an original poem too, in honor of the occasion.

Amy wrote her invitations on tiny paper, decorated with funny crests and tail-pieces made by combining the figures of her Brownie-stamps in many ingenious groups. The invitations said that Amy would be happy to see her friends at three o'clock. Promptly to the minute the door-bell rang; and there stood Ronald, Jack, and Phyllis, all dressed in their best, and all smiles, bearing a pot of primula in bloom for Amy. They were followed almost immediately by the other guests (if grown people would only be so beautifully prompt!), bearing various little gifts, and the party was ready to begin.

The children fell in at once with Amy's proposal that they should first play French charades. They divided into two companies, one staying in the parlor, the other retiring into the library. Amy was careful to choose Ida Jones in her company, because she feared the other side might not want her. Soon Theodore came out from the parlor, and said,—

“We have chosen a word that rhymes with ‘oh.’”

The library party were now to act in pantomime what they thought this word was, while the others had to guess what word the actors were trying to represent.

Theodore and his section in the parlor seated themselves in a semi-circle, within the parlor's double-door, facing the square hall which was to be the stage.

“They'll have a hard time guessing that word,” said Theodore.

“I'm sure of it,” said Laura; “for I can think right off of at least twenty words ending in the ‘oh’ sound.”

"'Sh! here they come now," said Janet.

The whole troop of actors came on, headed by Amy, to whom closely clung shy little Phyllis. Both sides had wanted Phyllis; but Phyllis, looking so sweet in her dainty white frock, had clung to Cousin Amy, much to Amy's delight, for now she could have Phyllis without seeming impolite to her guests.

The actors bent over, and went in rows up and down the hall, swinging their arms.

"What *are* they doing?" asked Laura.

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Janet.

"No," suddenly exclaimed Theodore; "it is n't 'mow.'"

The actors laughed, and ran back into the library. Next, Rob and Ronald appeared, and Rob hit Ronald.

"No," cried several voices; "it is n't 'blow.'"

But Rob and Ronald kept on squaring away at each other.

"We told you it was n't 'blow,'" said Laura.

"But this is another word," said Rob.

"Oh, I see," said Marguerite. "No; it is n't 'foe.'"

Then Irene came in and sat down in a chair, wearing one of Mrs. Strong's dresses, and a languid, grown-up air that bespoke her a young lady. To her entered Jack, wearing Professor Strong's tall hat, which sat well down on his ears. Taking it off with some difficulty, he made a low bow to Irene.

"'Bow' does n't rhyme with 'oh,'" said some one.

"It is n't 'bow' at all," said Jack.

Then he offered his small arm to Irene, who reached down to take it, affecting to hide her blushes behind a fan; and they marched off, arm in arm, amid the loud applause of the audience, and cries of, "It is n't 'beau.'"

Then the actors all came in with raised umbrellas, and, shivering with cold, seemed to wade through something deep.

"No, no; it is n't 'snow,'" shouted every one. "Do you want to give it up?"

"No; we will never give up," answered the actors, as they retired again.

Then they came in and hoed with imaginary "hoes;" then they all squatted down for "low;" then they kneaded imaginary "dough," and had a "row" in an imaginary boat,—but all in vain. Then they all came in weeping aloud with terrible "woe;" then Jack and Ronald were seen to "throw" a ball back and forth; then Amy, seated on a throne, with a paper crown on her head, commanded her trembling couriers to "go;" and yet they had not hit upon the right word.

"They might as well give up," said Laura. "They will never guess it."

There had been a longer whispered conference than usual this time, with much giggling. The actors now filed out, with laughing, confident faces, that seemed to say, "We have it now." They stood in a row facing their audience, and, clapping their arms against their sides like wings, gave vent to a mighty "crow."

"Yes, yes!" shouted the audience. "That's it. Wasn't 'crow' a capital word? Now you must find us as hard a one."

Theodore and his company now retired to the library; and Amy and her troop took seats in the parlor, Phyllis in Amy's little willow chair in the centre, with every one wanting to sit next to her.

"They all paid court to Phyllis, and vied for her

favor, as if she were a queen," said Amy afterward, in talking over the party with her mother.

Rob soon informed the actors that the word they must find rhymed with "sake." The first scene was acted by Marguerite alone. She walked complacently along, evidently, from her fan and parasol, on a warm summer's day, gathering imaginary flowers as she strolled, when suddenly she started in such alarm, uttered such a piercing shriek, and fled in such terror, that every one cried at once, "No; it is n't 'snake.'"

In the next scene, May Morgan as domestic, under Marguerite as housekeeper, dusted the apartment, and knocked something over with a crash. May cried into her apron, while Marguerite pointed sternly to the door.

"It is n't 'break,'" said Amy.

Then Marguerite summoned her husband to deal with the maid; and Theo, arrayed in Professor Strong's coat and hat, entered and proceeded to shake the weeping maid. But it was n't "shake." Then the actors all came on with their faces bandaged, holding their jaws in evident agony.

"No; it is n't 'ache,'" cried the audience, chuckling that their word was also found hard to guess. The actors went on, through "rake," "take," "make," "bake," "wake," "quake," until finally, when they all went sailing on a "lake," that was found to be the word.

"Now let's play 'Send a Ship to Ireland,'" said Laura. "Did you ever play that?"

It appearing that no one knew this game, Laura began by saying,—

"I am going to send a ship to Ireland, loaded with

things for the relief of the famine sufferers. You must all contribute. There are certain things you can send, and others that you cannot. The game is to find out what you can send. I will send dates. What will you send, Irene?"

"I will send bananas," said Irene.

"Yes; you can send bananas. What will you send, Amy?"

As every one now thought that fruit was the proper thing to send, Amy offered oranges.

"No; you can't send oranges," said Laura.

After this, no one seemed to hit on the right thing to send. When it came her turn again, Laura said she would send "doves;" but when Irene offered "chickens," that did not answer. It was some time before the children guessed the secret,—that each must send some article whose first letter was the same as the first letter of his or her own name. For instance, Irene Brownell could send bananas, and May Morgan, meal, and Rob Clover, cookies, and Bessie Paxton, potatoes, and Ida Jones, jelly, and Janet Frazier, figs. The poor Strongs were hard pushed to find articles beginning with "s." Theo said he would send a shad; and Marguerite offered sugar; while Amy, in desperation, said she would send a sheep.

Cousin Elizabeth now came in. She had come to play the piano; and the children played "Musical Chairs." A row of chairs was arranged in the hall, one for each child, but turned alternately, front and back. The music began to play; the children rose; Mrs. Strong took away one chair, so that when they next sat down some one must be chairless; and the children marched merrily around the chairs to the

music, ready to scramble for seats the instant the music stopped. Theodore was the first one left out. Each time they marched, another chair was removed and some one else was left out, until at last, around the one chair left, Rob and Ronald marched, very quickly when behind it, very slowly and lingeringly when before it, each keeping a hand on it. So prompt were they when the music finally stopped suddenly, that both sat down at once, Rob in Ronald's lap, which made all the children laugh uproariously.

Now Cousin Elizabeth struck up a lively air; and Mrs. Strong formed the children in a little procession, headed by Amy and Phyllis, and had them march all around the rooms, bringing up at last in the dining-room. The children's eyes shone brighter than before, if possible, as they gazed at the table,—a pretty sight, with its flowers and fruit, fancy cakes and confectionery, the big birthday cake in the centre, one of Bridget's best efforts, with fourteen bright-colored candles blazing on it, thirteen for the thirteen happy years, and "one to grow on." Beside each plate was a dainty little blue china cup and saucer,—a gift from Amy to her friends, to be carried home as a souvenir of her thirteenth birthday. By each plate was also a huge cracker.

Pop, pop, went the crackers all around the table, and then the children donned the fanciful paper caps that were inside the bonbons. The gas was lighted, because the cloudy February day already grew duskish. The gas shone brightly down on the happy children in their gay caps, chattering and eating ice-cream, the birthday cake with its glory of lights, the flowers and brightness, and Amy, at the top of the

table, a fantastic pink cap resting like a crown on her golden hair, her face radiant with happiness, as she tried to help every one have a good time.

"What a pretty sight it is!" said Cousin Elizabeth to Mrs. Strong.

"Yes; there's nothing prettier than a group of happy children," said Mrs. Strong. "And children are so easily made happy."

After refreshments, the party went gayly on. "London Bridge" was understood to be "falling down;" and one could easily believe it, by the racket. No one would imagine twenty children could make such a noise, unless they had heard a "party" in its last stages.

When the fun was most fast and furious, the melancholy sound of the door-bell was heard. Alas! it was the carriage for Marguerite and Theodore. Then Cousin Elizabeth said,—

"Come, Ronald and Jack, get your things. It is time to go home."

"Oh, I don't want to go yet," said Jack.

"But you must. See, Irene and Kitty and Rob and all the children are going. The party is over."

"Oh, dear!" said Ronald; "I wish it were just beginning."

"So do I," said Jack.

But everything comes to an end, even parties, so the children all came and bade Mrs. Strong and Amy good-night, and the girls said,—

"We've had a perfectly *lovely* time, Amy; and the cup and saucer are *so sweet*."

When Ida Jones imitated the others and came and said good-by as they did, and Mrs. Strong noticed

her happy face, the care with which she carried the precious cup and saucer, and her loving look at Amy, it gave her a pang to think that she might have deprived the child of all this happiness, and put a rankling hurt in its place, but for Amy.

When the last child had gone, and "silence came to heal the blows of sound," as Mrs. Strong could not help thinking to herself as she smoothed and straightened out the rumpled rugs, and replaced chairs and tables that seemed engaged in a wild game of romps on their own account all over the parlor and hall, Amy began dancing lightly around and around the hall.

"What is the matter, darling?" asked her mother. "Can't you subside yet?"

"I'm so full of joyous joy, I must dance," said Amy. "It's been such a happy birthday. Every one is so kind, and all my friends had such a nice time, and I did too. I'm ever so much obliged to you, mamma, for taking so much trouble for me."

Amy spent the evening writing out a full account of the day in her "diary," which she kept in a large book, that looked like a court docket, as in fact it was, having been given her by her Grandpa May, when she was in Massachusetts. There were a few legal entries in the front, "*Jones and Smith vs. John Robinson et al.*" and so on,—very dry reading compared with Amy's diary, which was illuminated by gay pictures scattered over its pages, and often bristled with exclamation-points. In some parts of the volume she had copied her own stories; in another place she was writing a wonderful play, called "*Elfrida, the*

Changeling," and she had also drawn up one or two wills in it, disposing of all her little treasures. So it was a book of great variety.

To-night the birthday entry ended, —

"I am *so* happy, *so* happy!"

CHAPTER XV.

SAINT VALENTINE'S DAY.

EARLY February was signalized by the appearance of the first number of the boys' paper, called "The Spark." It was of four pages, fairly well printed, considering it was the work of novices; and although its size was only four inches by three, one could easily believe the editorial, which said, "There is more work than one would imagine in getting out such a paper as this, and we hope it will be appreciated by a long list of subscribers, who will please remember that a *small spark* will kindle a great fire." The editors further remarked, "We would like to have our business men favor us with their advertisements, which we will print at reasonable rates."

On the last page appeared the advertisements of good-natured Dr. Trimble and Mr. Murray, the druggist; and a cousin of Ben Bruce living in Metropolis, Ill., also advertised himself as "Dealer in lumber, and Manufacturer of Plough handles,"—articles that seemed not likely to be in great demand among "The Spark's" subscribers.

But the leading advertisement, both in space and profusion of capitals, was —

BROWN LEGHORNS, PLYMOUTH ROCKS, AND BANTAMS
FOR SALE. SINGLE FOWLS, PAIRS, OR TRIOS. EGGS IN
SEASON.

Apply to
BRUCE, CARMAN, AND WILLIAMS.

"The Barr Brothers" announced themselves "Dealers in Pigeons." In fact, it was evident that "The Spark" was issued in the poultry interest. The leading article was on "The Wyandotte," and began, "The chicken is perhaps the most popular of all fowls. They are very profitable, and afford a great deal of pleasure."

"There, mamma," said Amy, who was reading "The Spark" aloud with the greatest interest, "you hear that. I do hope you are going to let me have those chickens this spring. Elliot will give me three bantams, he says. Think what a chance that is!"

"I am willing if your father is," said her mother.

"I do hope papa will consent," said Amy. "You see this paper says chickens are very profitable, and I'm sure they would afford me 'a great deal of pleasure.' 'The Spark' will be very useful. It says at the end of this article, 'We will try to give some good advice concerning the treatment of fowls in our next issue.'"

Under the head of "Important Events," "The Spark" said, "Valentine's Day will come as usual on February 14."

This announcement was hardly necessary, for all the children of Hillside Avenue were already hoarding up every penny they could lay hands on, and running up to Miss Blau's store, whose windows were

now full of the most distracting variety of hearts and darts, cupids, roses and posies. Even one cent would buy a pretty little valentine, while what the boys called "a five-center" was of inconceivable size and magnificence.

Amy and Irene, being gifted with pencil and brush, were busily at work in all spare moments, making many of their valentines; and very dainty and pretty were some of their designs. Amy's favorite verse, not original, but admired for the sentiment, which she put on all the valentines for her most intimate girl friends, was,—

"Remember me now,
Remember me ever;
Remember the fun
We have had together."

Valentine's Day was a lively day on the avenue, the children scampering up and down the street, placing valentines on their friends' front-door sills, giving the door-bell a twitch, and then dashing out of sight around the corner.

The first pull at the Strong's bell came before Amy was up. She sprang out of bed, ran to her side window, and looked right down on Rob and Kitty, who were hiding around the corner, lest Nora should see them when she came to the door.

"Ah, ha, Miss Kitty, I've caught you!" cried Amy, from above.

"Now, Amy," said Kitty, "that is n't fair."

Amy hurried downstairs, to enjoy the excitement of running to the door every time the bell rang, trying to catch her valentines. If, as was often the

case, they were too spry for her, then she had to study the "disguised" handwritings, to see if she could make out from whom they came. After the postman had left his load, the mantel-piece in the Strong's library was a perfect blaze of brightness with valentines gorgeous in lace paper,— "To my Love," "To a Fair One," "To my Dear," and so on.

Some funny ones came from two little friends, Catherine and Helen, Dr. Kittredge's little girls, who were just launched in the kindergarten, and who had evidently worked hard to cut out the odd little designs from bright tissue-paper, and paste them on the small sheets as their fancy suggested.

"How cunning these are!" said Amy. "I believe I like these best of all."

Amy had taken great pains to prepare the most sentimental valentines for both Nora and Bridget. It took much contrivance to get these out the front door, ring the bell, dash into the house, and be discovered innocently reading in the library, when Nora went to the door.

Amy intended Nora should think hers from the milkman, whose horses were always sure of a long rest before the Strong's door; but Nora, oddly enough, was very suspicious.

Amy said, "Perhaps that is from the milkman, Nora."

Nora's pretty face was suffused with blushes; but she said,—

"Indeed, now, Miss Amy, I guess it's yourself that knows well enough where that valentine came from."

Bridget, holding hers up, looked at it quizzically, and said,—

"And sure, 'From my Beau' is it? Indade, and

I'm glad to hear from him at last, for it's tired of cooking I am. I'll be going into town this very afternoon for my white silk wedding dress."

Amy, Irene, Kitty, and Rob waited until the dusk of evening, and then ran about to do their "valentining."

"We had such fun," said Amy, when she came in. "We had a great time leaving them at Laura's, for she was watching; and we thought we never could put them down and ring the bell without her catching us. But we did, finally. We ran behind their big spruce-tree, and squatted down. We could hear Laura dash open the door and look all about; but we kept perfectly still, and she never saw us. But Ben Bruce popped right out on us, the minute we barely touched the bell, before we had time to run. Rob sent Van Gooding such a funny one; that is, funny for him to send Van. It was so sentimental. It was 'To my Sweet,' and said,—

'With a love that 's true, I love thee,
With a love that 's fond, my sweet ;
With a love that will not waver
Till my heart shall cease to beat.'

Was n't that too ridiculous? When Kitty laughed at Rob about it, he said,—

"'Well, I was n't going to send that to any girl, and I did n't want to lose the cent I paid for it either.'"

The boys now printed and delivered the calling-cards ordered of them by the young ladies of the avenue. To be sure, ink had not been spared, and they were rather smeary and crocky; but the girls were delighted with them, and cheerfully paid the five cents a dozen demanded. For an afternoon or two, they found much pleasure in arraying themselves in full dress, donning kid gloves, and flying up and

down the avenue, making calls of much state and ceremony on each other. They sat very erect, with their card-cases in their hands, called each other "Miss Strong," "Miss Clover," and so on, and exchanged dignified remarks about the weather and the health of their dolls, ending with —

"Now do come and see me very soon," and then skipped on to the next place.

The calls were promptly returned, the very next day at latest. But after an afternoon or two of this pleasure, they decided that it was, after all, more fun to be little girls than grown-up ladies, and went back to tricycles and skipping-ropes with more activity than ever.

It is sad to relate that the Other Brightside Club disbanded about this time, it was understood in a fight between the two leading candidates for the presidency, Woodard and Gooding; not one of your tame, grown-up, political contests of ballots, bribery, and brag, but an honest out-and-out tussle, a real knock-down and drag-out affair, which led to a split in the club that could never be healed.

The Brightside Club had finally found it necessary to admit more than the original ten members, as of course they must have Irene, and Ned and Janet Frazier, and May Morgan; so now some of the favorite boys from the Other Club were also invited to join. The evenings were so short, and the club so large, that, by the persuasion of some of the mothers, the evening meetings were dropped for the present. But it was understood that the club still existed, — an organization of the children of Hillside Avenue for good works, now and then, when opportunity offered.

CHAPTER XVI.

EASTER.

NOWHERE is spring lovelier — one is tempted to say, nowhere is it half so lovely — as in Southern Ohio. The air is soft and bland, with no hints of lingering snowbanks to chill it; and in a night almost, before you can quite believe it, the grass is green, the poplars have hung out their fringe of brown tassels, the maples and elms are hazy with millions of tiny blossoms, the crocuses push their heads out, and spring is upon you.

The spring came with a rush this year. The lawns on Hillside Avenue, planted with many crocuses, were now a lovely sight, the flowers starring the green grass everywhere with gold and purple splendor. Soon the wild flowers began to come; all the cherry and pear trees were snowy white with bloom; and the red bud blazed in crimson glory in the woods and along the hillsides. Mrs. Strong's magnolia was covered with creamy white blossoms; her hyacinth and tulip beds gleamed like brilliant jewels set in the verdant velvet of the lawn; and all the other flower-beds up and down the avenue followed suit. Then the apple-trees added their pink radiance to the display; and all the elms and maples were covered with leaves of tender green, until the sloping hillsides and green vistas of Hillside

Avenue were a dream of beauty, seeming too lovely to be real.

The birds, who were in great force in the big trees overhanging the hollow, welcomed the early dawn with such floods of rippling, overflowing, joyous song, that it was impossible to sleep after four o'clock; at least, if one happened to wake he gladly lay awake, wondering at all this flood of joy that swept over the world.

The damp hollow below the Strong's was the chosen home of the wild violet. Looking out almost any time before or after school, Amy's brown straw hat, that perched so jauntily on her flowing locks, accompanied by various other small hats, might be seen bobbing about, here and there, in the hollow, as the children gathered great handfuls of the blue violets. Amy was a great lover of flowers; they were like persons to her. She never could bear to see one wasted or thrown away, and always begged to have even withered flowers spared a little longer. Now she kept bowls and glass dishes full of the blue violets standing about the library and parlor, besides keeping Cousin Elizabeth and Miss Sadie Humphreys well supplied.

"Can't I put on a gingham dress to-day?" was now the cry. "Two girls at school had on gingham dresses to-day; and Irene says she is going to wear one to-morrow. I'm roasting in this woollen dress."

Rob and the other boys bloomed forth in shirt waists; and the mothers must evidently hurry to make new gingham dresses or let down the old ones, if they would save the lives of their perishing little daughters.

Amy, Kitty, Rob, Irene, Ben Bruce, and Paul, accompanied by Miss Sadie and Miss Maude, for "chaperones," as the girls said, went to Beech Woods for wild flowers. They took baskets and trowels, and brought back, not only great handfuls of the fragrant wild white hyacinth, and nodding "Dutchman's breeches," spring beauties, yellow and blue violets, and purple and white adder-tongue, but also many roots. Mrs. Strong happened to be out when this expedition returned.

"What mischief are you up to now, I should like to know?" said Nora, looking off from the porch, which she was cleaning.

The children were digging on the strip of lawn between the Strongs' house and the Clovers' driveway, working away with much industry. Rob had the wheelbarrow, and was bringing up loads of big stones from the lower end of the driveway, much aided by Duke, who bounced around him, back and forth, as he worked. The girls had trowels and Mrs. Strong's big watering-pot, and were also hard at work digging, sometimes taking a turn at the wheelbarrow for variety.

"We're making a rockery," said Amy, all enthusiasm over this beautiful plan. "We're going to fill it full of these lovely wild flower-roots that we have brought home from Beech Woods. And only see, Nora, we dug up this little elder-bush, and are going to plant it in the middle of the rockery! Elderberry blossoms are so pretty. And I found such a dear little blackberry bush. I've set it out there, by the corner of the house. We can raise our own berries now. Is n't the rockery lovely, Nora?"

"The things won't live," said Nora.

"Yes, they will, for we are going to water them regularly."

"I guess your father won't think much of your rockery," said Nora.

True enough, when Professor Strong came home, he did look a little annoyed when his eyes were greeted by this pile of stones, filled with earth turned to mud by the profuse waterings it had received, looking not unlike a mammoth chicken-pie, certainly an odd ornament for a gentleman's lawn. Amy stood anxiously by, waiting the doom of the rockery; but it looked so funny and childish that the professor could not help relenting toward it.

"Amy will not be a child much longer," he thought. Then he said, —

"I will allow the rockery to remain for the present; but don't lay out any further landscape improvements on the place, Amy, without first consulting me."

"No, papa, I will not," said Amy, only too glad that the precious rockery was to be tolerated.

The rockery had every attention. Besides the most elaborate diggings and constant culture, and the profuse sprinklings and pourings of water given it early and late by Amy and Kitty, Rob flooded it regularly, whenever he had the hose out. But under the summer heats, when the children were away, everything in the rockery withered and died except the elderberry bush. In the fall, Mr. Green was sent to cart away the stones and earth, and returf the spot, but the berry bushes were allowed to grow. People might wonder that Professor Strong should set out

elderberries and blackberry bushes as ornamental shrubs. They did not know that they were spared because planted by the hands of the little girl who loved everything that grew.

Amy had another season of painting early and late now, for Easter was close at hand. Bridget was interviewed.

"Bridget, won't you please break a little hole in the end of all the eggs you use, and just blow out the inside, so I can have the shells to paint?"

"Well, now, that is a fine plan. I think I see myself, when I'm in a hurry with my cooking, stopping to blow eggs!" said Bridget, who had just scorched some cake, and was not in an affable humor.

"Ah, Bridget, I think you might," said Amy, most coaxingly.

"No; it's no eggs I'll be blowing. I've got something else to do."

Amy left the kitchen badly discouraged. But Bridget's bark was always much more deadly than her bite. One day she called Amy out into the kitchen, and astonished and delighted her by holding out a plate full of egg-shells, carefully blown.

"Here," she said, "take your shells, and don't be bothering me again with blowing eggs."

"Oh, thank you, Bridget," said Amy. "You are just as kind as you can be."

"Oh, go along with your blarney," said Bridget, pleased, nevertheless, with Amy's pleasure.

Amy painted her egg-shells, with crosses and flowers, in humble imitation of Cousin Elizabeth's beautiful work, about which Amy came home every day full of enthusiasm.

"Cousin Elizabeth is painting a dozen lovely great goose-eggs," she told her mother. "I do wonder if she means one for me."

"It would n't be strange," said Mrs. Strong. "Cousin Elizabeth never forgets you."

"She is always so kind," said Amy.

Easter Sunday morning, there came a ring at the door-bell, and there stood Ronald and Jack, looking so bright and happy because they were bringing a present to their dear cousin Amy. The box they gave Amy was found to contain one of the largest goose-eggs. On one side was a cross painted with gold, half concealed by some of Amy's blue violets faithfully copied, the letters "I. H. N." painted beside it. On the other side, in gold letters, was inscribed, "The Brightside Easter." Amy hung the goose-egg up by its white satin ribbon as one of the choicest ornaments of her own room, where also went the various rabbits, chickens, eggs, and Easter cards, that came from other friends. These numerous ornaments made Amy's room the admiration of her girl friends, but were poor Nora's despair when it came to dusting.

When Amy went out in the kitchen to show the goose-egg to Bridget, Bridget said,—

— "Why did n't you get up early to see the sun dance this morning? I was up before sunrise."

"Did it really dance, Bridget?"

"Indeed, it did that. It hopped up and down in the heavens enough to put your eyes out. I saw it myself."

Easter Sunday was an ideal day, like George Herbert's —

“Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky,”—

a day joyous with singing birds and blooming flowers, a day whose sweet, still air and radiant calm seemed of itself to speak of eternal life.

Amy set off early for Sunday-school with Kitty and Rob, they being soon joined by Elliot, Paul, Ben Bruce, and the Goldschmidts. Most of the children carried bunches of flowers; and the girls were happy in their new spring hats and dresses. The Sunday-school room was crowded, many of the parents having dropped in to see the children’s Easter. The children’s offerings of flowers (put in tumblers from the church kitchen for want of enough vases) decorated the piano and the whole front of the platform.

The children sang the Easter songs more jubilantly than ever before, because their voices were uplifted and sustained by the melody of a violin and ’cello with which two young people of the church reinforced the piano, and by Dr. Taylor’s deep bass voice, which often furnished the backbone of the Sunday-school singing. Thus aided, joyfully did the fresh young voices soar up in the chorus of Ware’s Easter hymn, “Lift your glad voices” :—

“Sad were the life we must part with to-morrow,
If tears were our birthright, and death were our end.
But Jesus hath cheered the dark valley of sorrow,
And bade us, immortal, to heaven ascend.
Lift your glad voices in triumph on high,
For Jesus hath risen, and man shall not die !’

Little did the children think now of the hymn’s meaning, but nevertheless it was there, deep in their

hearts, implanted with all the strength of youthful impressions; and in the years to come, when tears and death and sorrow should be, at last, familiar words, the faith learned in joyous childhood would enable them to bear it all, reverently and trustingly.

After reading with the superintendent the Easter service, some of the children spoke verses appropriate to the day. Amy and Kitty spoke together Frederick L. Hosmer's hymn, "The Rose is queen among the flowers." The shy Amy would never have been able to speak alone, but sustained by the company of courageous Kitty, she managed to get through her part, though it was indeed a terrible moment when the superintendent said so calmly, as if it were a matter of course,—

"We will now hear from some of the girls in Mrs. Hilton's class."

With fast-beating hearts and blushing faces, the girls went down to the front, and stood facing the school, a pretty contrast. Kitty personified not badly the rose, and Amy the lily,—Kitty with her great dark eyes, and abundant brown hair curling up around her fresh, rosy cheeks, under the black leghorn hat trimmed with scarlet poppies; and Amy, slender and delicate, her fair face and blue eyes expressive of perfect purity, framed by a halo of light flowing hair, under the drooping white leghorn trimmed with apple blossoms.

Kitty said the first verse alone,—

"The rose is queen among the flowers,
None other is so fair;
The lily, nodding on her stem,
With fragrance fills the air."

Then Amy said the second verse, —

“But sweeter than the lily’s breath,
And than the rose more fair,
The tender love of human hearts
That springeth everywhere.”

Kitty then recited the third verse, —

“The rose will fade and fall away,
The lily too will die ;
But love shall live forevermore,
Beyond the starry sky.”

Finally, the two girls recited the last verse in concert, —

“Then sweeter than the lily’s breath,
And than the rose more fair,
The tender love of human hearts
Upspringing everywhere.”

Miss Rose Carman, who taught the infant class, had, with infinite pains, drilled the younglings to recite a poem called “Easter Bells.” A bell made of flowers, with a calla lily for a clapper, hung over the platform; and each little speaker, at the end of his or her verse, advanced and gave the clapper a pull,— a pretty sight, because the little ones themselves evidently enjoyed it so much. Then all the school recited with the superintendent “The Child’s Faith,” — a beautiful faith for any one, big or little, to have. This was it:—

A CHILD’S FAITH.

1. I believe that I am a child of God, my Heavenly Father, who created me, who preserves me, who loves me as His child.

2. I believe that Jesus was my Heavenly Father's best-loved Son; and that I shall be well-beloved, as he was, if I become like him.

3. I believe that God, and all good angels, and all good men and women, and all good children, are helping me all the time to lead a holy life.

4. I believe that all my faults may be corrected; and my sins, if I repent of them sincerely, and try to be good, will be forgiven and forgotten.

5. I believe that we can make a heaven in our homes by our kindness and love.

6. I believe that I shall not die when my body dies, and that there will be a heaven hereafter for all good children.

7. I believe that all children will at last become good, and will go to heaven, to be happy in God's love forever.

The children sang another Easter carol, and then Dr. Taylor, as was his custom every year, gave each child a pansy root to be taken home and set out.

Amy and Kitty and Rob stayed to the church service, placing their pansy roots carefully down on the bottom of the pew, where they could keep an eye on them. Amy was much sustained during the sermon, which was above her head, by frequent consultations of her precious watch, which, with a delicate consideration for the preacher's feelings not always shown by older hearers, she took off and laid in a hollow of the cushion beside her, so that she might look at it whenever she pleased, without Dr. Taylor's seeing her.

As soon as church was over, she and Rob and Kitty hurried off home, bearing the precious roots.

"Where shall we plant our pansies?" asked Rob.
"In the rockery?"

"No; that is too full already," said Amy. "I shall put mine in my own flower-bed."

Amy had a flower-bed of her own by the side-door steps, where flourished an odd mixture of flowers, wild and tame, but all dear to Amy.

"We might plant ours in our vegetable garden, Rob," said Kitty.

"Oh, yes," said Rob. "So we can. I did n't think of that."

Rob and Kitty had started a vegetable plot near their playhouse, and expected to make a fortune selling vegetables to their mother, she having agreed to buy all they raised. They had planted corn and beans, whose growth was somewhat hindered by the fact that the seeds were frequently dug up, to see how they were getting along. They also brought some onions out of the cellar and planted them. The onions proved a profitable crop, for after they had been in the ground but two days, Rob dug them up and sold them to his good-natured mother for ten cents. He told Amy about it, saying,—

"I guess we shall plant some more onions right away, and maybe some radishes, if Maggie will let us have some. Ah, here comes old Duke now to meet us."

Duke, who had been lying out under the trees a long time, watching for the children, came bounding down the avenue, his silky tail flying out like a banner, and, running and leaping around them, escorted the little pansy procession joyfully home.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COLLECTION MANIA.

EASTER SUNDAY afternoon, Dr. and Mrs. Hough drove out from the city to sit a while on the Strong's front porch, as was their custom on most pleasant summer Sundays. The Houghs, like the Strong's, were from Massachusetts, and were old friends. The doctor was an eminent surgeon, whose skill caused him to be sent for to perform difficult operations, even to Nebraska and other far-away States. In these travels, the doctor had some odd experiences, which he well knew how to set forth in good stories. No one was better company than the doctor ; and wherever he went, the children were sure to gather around him.

He was a very large man, with a loud, hearty voice and laugh, and what might seem at first a rough, brusque manner; but his heart was as "big as his body," and as he loved children, taking the greatest interest in all their affairs, the children were not long in finding this out. He and Amy were the best of friends. When Amy was a timid little thing, shy of most strangers, she would toddle up to the doctor with her last doll or new kitten, sure that he would sympathize, and, very likely, tell her some interesting cat story,—something, probably, that happened in that remarkable time when the doctor "was a boy." Amy always wished she had lived then.

This afternoon, Amy was sitting on the front porch, deep in "Little Women" for the fourth or fifth time, when the trot of horses' feet attracted her attention from the absorbing story, and there came the well-known coupé with the two fat, shining black horses, and the equally fat and shining black Tom on top. After the first greetings, Amy sat a while, hoping that the doctor might get started on some of his good stories; but, as ill luck would have it, he and her father fell to talking politics, while Mrs. Hough was giving her mother a full account of the new plans of the Women's Christian Association, of which she was president. As neither of these topics interested Amy, she thought she would go out and feed the doctor's horses.

The horses pricked up their ears joyfully when they saw their friend Amy coming, for they well knew what delicate attentions they might expect. Amy pulled great handfuls of the fresh, juicy grass, which the horses had no doubt been eying longingly; and they, with ears pricked up and nostrils quivering with eagerness, yet picked the grass daintily and carefully with their great mouths from Amy's small hand, that would not have been half a mouthful to them.

"How polite horses are!" said Amy, as she patted their velvety necks.

This pleased Tom, the coachman, sitting aloft, serene in the spring sunshine, and led him to tell Amy stories illustrating how much all horses knew, especially Jim and Dan, the doctor's horses.

All this was very pleasant, both to the horses and their little friend. Finally Amy said, —

"I am going to pick some dandelions, and trim their heads. It is Easter, and they ought to have some flowers too."

Amy was not quite sure whether Mrs. Hough would enjoy driving into the city with her horses' heads trimmed with dandelion blooms; but she felt sure of the doctor's appreciation, for he used to love dandelions himself when he was a boy. He had told her so. Amy went down on the sloping hillside where the grass looked like a green sky, so starred over was it with the yellow flowers. Coming up the driveway with her hand full of the dandelions, and some of the spruce-tree's tender green tips, she spied a queer stone among the gravel.

"How odd! I wonder what it is?" thought Amy. "I will show it to Dr. Hough, as soon as I have trimmed the horses. Perhaps he can tell."

Dr. Hough's great hobby and recreation was natural history. He was one of the founders and chief promoters of the Cincinnati Natural History Society; and its fine collection had been enriched by many valuable contributions from him. In his travels he was always on the look-out for natural curiosities of all sorts; and people where he went soon learned his tastes, and saved any choice specimen they found to give or sell to the doctor.

The doctor was full of interest in Amy's stone.

"That," he said, "is a brachiopod, and a very pretty specimen, too."

"A brachiopod?" exclaimed Amy, in wonder.

"Yes. A big word, is n't it?"

"It feels heavy, like a stone," said Amy; "but it looks exactly like a shell."

"It is both," said the doctor ; "that is, it is a fossilized shell,—a shell turned to stone."

"But how did it come in our driveway ?" asked Amy.

"That's a pretty long story," said the doctor.

Amy seated herself on the doorsteps, prepared to be entertained, and the doctor went on,—

"You see, Amy, this world of ours has been a long time in making, and it is n't done yet. Ages ago, there was nothing but water all over where we are sitting now,—one vast sea; and at first, the only living creatures were little sea animals, corals, and crinoids, and shell-fish, like this, and trilobites. These creatures were numerous beyond anything we can imagine. You may have noticed, in all the changes and cutting through and down great hills going on around Cincinnati, that these hills are composed of layers of limestone. They are as regular almost as if laid up by hand, layer upon layer, with deposits of clay and earth between.

"Many people pass by these cuts every day, and never notice them; yet nothing is more wonderful, for here we can peep into the dim ages past, and see something of the making of the world, far, far back, long before a man was ever thought of. These layers of limestone are composed wholly of deposits of little shell-fish on what was then the bottom of the sea. In most of the stone you can plainly see the layers of shells and coral, and even pick them off with your fingers. After the deposit of shell-fish came a deposit of mud and sediment, then another layer of fish, and so on, as the sea slowly receded and grew shallower, until finally, a few islands emerged here and there, our

highest hill-tops now ; and so gradually the dry land appeared, and the earth was ready for animal life. We go to these hills, and cut out chunks of these shell-fish, so to speak, and build our cellar walls and our cross-walks of them, and pound them up to macadamize our roads, and never think of the ages and ages that it took to prepare our stone for us."

"How very interesting!" said Amy, her imaginative mind keenly alive to the charm of this glimpse into bygone ages.

"Yes," said the doctor; "this world is a wonderfully interesting place, and the more we know about it, the more we find to wonder at. Come out on the driveway. I dare say we can find some coral there. You can't go amiss of it in any stone heap around Cincinnati."

Under the doctor's guidance, Amy found several bits of fossil coral scattered among the gravel, in stems an inch or two long, rough with little star-like points, with some branches, and scars where other branches had broken off. She also, to her delight, found a stone as large as her hand, in which was imbedded flat shells.

"I wonder I never saw these shells before," she said.

"That is a very common experience," said Dr. Hough. "We don't see what is right under our eyes, until we open our eyes to look at it."

"I'm going to keep my eyes wide open now," said Amy; "and I'm going to keep everything I find, and make a collection."

"That's right," said the doctor, heartily. "A capital idea! I'll help you. Did you ever see a trilobite?"

"No, Dr. Hough. What is that?"

"I'll bring you out one next Sunday."

Amy had now a new and great interest. Her father bought her a small geological hammer; and equipped with this and a basket, she scoured the neighborhood for natural fossils and curiosities. Not alone, of course. If Amy had a new enthusiasm, it was apt to spread among the children. Rival collectors sprang up on the avenue, the chief of them being Ben Bruce and Elliot Carman. Irene, Kitty, and Rob accompanied Amy and Elliot on their rambles, and gave their findings to these friends, while the older boys on the street aided Ben in his researches.

Nothing could better have suited Elliot's natural tastes. He was almost like a new boy under the influence of this congenial pursuit, showing a quick intelligence and interest that delighted his mother.

"I do believe Elliot has found his mission in life at last," she said.

The zeal of the young collectors was indefatigable. One warm day, Mrs. Strong, sitting on her porch, saw Amy, Kitty, and Rob coming, laden with enormous slabs of stone,—enormous, that is, for their strength. Duke trotted along behind them with the air of being a partner in the business. Their faces were red, their hats pushed back on their heads, their hair moist with perspiration, and their clothes yellow from the yellow clay adhering to the slabs. They deposited the precious slabs on the porch with groans of relief.

"There! I'm glad to get rid of that load," said Kitty.

"I thought my arms would drop off before I could get here," said Amy.

"My arms don't ache much," said Rob, taking off his hat to fan himself.

"I don't think I want those dirty stones on my porch, Amy," said her mother, surveying the pile of stones with disfavor. "Where did you bring them from?"

"From the vacant lot down at the corner," said Amy. "Some men are hauling loads of stone there, to fix the street, and they are full of fossils. As soon as I wash the clay off, you will see what fine specimens these are. Please let me leave them here, mamma, just a little while, till I go back to get some more. I'm afraid the boys will find them out and get the best specimens, if we don't hurry."

Mrs. Strong had not the heart to refuse. She even, later, helped Amy tug the stones down into the laundry, and wash them. When freed from their mask of yellow clay, some were really very curious. One in particular was a network of coral overlying coral, like a quantity of suddenly petrified worms, with here and there a little shell dropped in. Other slabs were made of layer upon layer of shells. Whole shells lay imbedded all over the surface, and the sides of the slab showed plainly the edges of the shells that composed it.

"I don't wonder that these stones fascinate you, Amy," said Mrs. Strong, gazing at the one she had just washed. "It is wonderful to think I can hold in my hand and look at what was created so many thousand, thousand years ago."

The next Sunday Dr. Hough, true to his promise, brought out not only one trilobite, but two, for Amy's collection. One was curled up, the other extended.

Amy laid the open one upon her hand, and it looked as if it were crawling along, giving her a creepy feeling, though she admired it greatly, and was overjoyed at this valuable addition to her collection.

"The trilobite was the aristocrat of his time," said Dr. Hough. "He was the highest order of living creatures then, the nearest to a fish."

"One of my slabs has a fish's backbone on it," said Amy.

"I doubt that," said the doctor. "Let me see it."

"No," said he, after inspecting the slab; "that is some species of coral. There were no fishes in the Silurian Era, when most of our rocks were formed."

"Where do you find trilobites?" asked Amy.

"They are found around Cincinnati, but in limited quantities."

"How I should love to find one!"

"Perhaps you will. Sometime, perhaps, when I'm not busy, I will take you and some of your little friends who are interested in such things on a trip to hunt for fossils, over the river, Ludlow way. That's a good place for them. But we must wait till the river is low, leaving the banks exposed. That's where I found my great trilobite."

And then the doctor related one of the minor tragedies of his life to the sympathizing Amy.

"It was years ago, when I first came to Cincinnati. I was driving down from the ferry to visit a patient in Ludlow, when I happened to see this great trilobite sticking out of the bank. It was a magnificent specimen,—long as that," said the doctor, measuring off about eight inches on his hand.

"What a monster!" said Amy.

"I've never seen such a one before or since. I thought to myself, 'When I come back, I'll stop and get that.' As I said, it was when I first came here, and I didn't know but you could pick up such trilobites every day. When I came back, that trilobite was gone."

"What a perfect shame!" said Amy, imagining how she should have felt.

"Yes; it was a shame to come so near a thing like that, and then lose it, by my own idiocy, too. I heard of it afterward, though. The man who found it sold it to the Smithsonian Institute for a very pretty sum, and there it is now."

"I do hope you will take us to Ludlow, Dr. Hough," said Amy.

"I will, sometime when I'm not busy," said the doctor.

Delusive promise, for when was the doctor ever known to be otherwise than busy?

That very week something happened to Amy almost as aggravating as the loss of the big trilobite to the doctor. Van Gooding and Fred Woodard and two of the Barrs, while prowling along the railroad cut north of Hillside Avenue, actually found a small trilobite in the bank, which they gave to Ben.

"To think I was so near a trilobite as that all the time, and never found it!" said Amy.

Elliot was equally disgusted with himself, for not having been the lucky boy to unearth that trilobite.

"I should so love," said Amy, "to find one myself, and think I was the first human being to see it, and that there it had lain, waiting for me, millions of

years. I shall go up to the railroad cut this very afternoon."

But in vain did Amy and Elliot and the other collectors slip and climb patiently up and down the steep sides of the cut. Evidently that trilobite was "a bachelor, and lived by himself," for no companions did he seem to have had.

Elliot's Uncle Hildreth gave him a fine trilobite, but, to Elliot's immense disgust, had it mounted in gold as a watch-charm.

"Now the thing 's spoiled," said Elliot, to whom gold and silver were as nothing compared to a natural trilobite. "I think Uncle Hildreth might have known better."

But his uncle afterward atoned for this shortsightedness by giving Elliot some fine specimens of gold, silver, and copper ore, samples of aluminum and other minerals, that gave his collection a great boom, and helped offset some of Dr. Hough's numerous presents to Amy.

Amy always looked hopefully at the doctor's pockets when he came out Sundays, and not without reason, for out of them was quite sure to be brought some delightful treasure for her collection. Often did the doctor, though a stout man, and the weather warm, toil upstairs to look with interest at Amy's collection. All the collectors on the street looked up to Dr. Hough as probably the greatest scientific man living; and all doubtful matters were saved until Sunday to be laid before the doctor, for his verdict.

Great excitement and interest were created among the big boys, about this time, by the finding over in Beech Woods the skull and other bones of some

unknown animal. Opinions were divided among them. Some thought it a horse's skeleton, but more were inclined to think it some rare foreign animal that had escaped from the Zoo. As the Zoo was located in the northwest corner of Edgeton, this was not impossible. The precious remains were intrusted to Ben, who felt that they could not be kept too carefully.

One day, Mrs. Bruce, who was a neat and vigilant housekeeper, fancied that she detected an ill odor in her library, of all places.

"It cannot be," she thought; "it must be my imagination. There could not be anything wrong here."

But the odor persisting, a search revealed the priceless bones stowed for safe keeping in the wastebasket under the overhanging cover of the library table; and to the stable they had to go, in spite of Ben's urgent protests.

The next Sunday, when Dr. Hough came out, the boys brought the bones over, and stood anxiously about, while the doctor surveyed the remains as judicially as if they were an interesting surgical problem. Finally he spoke,—

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, boys; but the fact is, those are a dog's skull and bones."

"A dog!" exclaimed Ben, disgusted.

"Yes; but if you are going to be naturalists, you must learn to see beauty in everything, even the skull of a dog. It is a wonderful structure. No man could construct anything so thin and light and yet so strong as that skull. Everything in nature is wonderful, if we know enough to appreciate it."

One day, Amy and Elliot joined forces, and went out on a collecting tour together. Their search was peculiarly successful. Amy came home in triumph, tugging in her arms something that was beyond her strength except as her will and determination gave her strength to bear it.

"What have you got now, Amy?" asked her mother, not without apprehension, for Amy's collection was growing formidable.

"I don't know, but it is something very curious," said Amy. "Elliot's piece is almost twice as big as mine. He found it first, and besides he is stronger than I. I had all I could do to carry this piece."

"I believe I never saw a stone like that before," said Mrs. Strong.

It was round, of a bluish-white color, about a foot long, four inches in diameter at the largest end, tapering gradually down, and as heavy as marble.

"It looks something like a piece of a huge icicle," said Mrs. Strong. "Where did you find such an odd stone?"

"On Dr. Trimble's hill, back of his house," said Amy.

"Oh!" said her mother.

"There are other rare stones there too, but we could not bring any more now."

"But I am afraid you have been doing mischief, Amy," said her mother. "Probably this belongs to the doctor; and it may be something he values."

Amy was much disturbed at this idea. She and Elliot had picked up the stones as natural products of the soil, so to speak.

Inquiry proved that the curiosities were portions

of stalactites that Dr. Trimble had brought from Mammoth Cave. At one time he had had a grotto ornamented with rare shells and stones on the spot, where the children found the stones. Much to the children's relief, the doctor kindly insisted that they should keep the stalactites.

It is wonderful how a collection grows, once started. The collectors' eyes were always open, on the eager look-out for possible treasures. Every cross-walk, every pile of stones, were eagerly scanned; and many a brachiopod, many a bit of coral, did they bring home, as well as many a worthless stone, worn by the storms of centuries into odd shapes that attracted the children's attention. Amy's coat and dress pockets always had more or less stones and sand in them, liable to rattle out at unexpected moments.

Of course, all the children's friends helped swell the collections. Amy's Uncle Cosgrove sent her a sword-fish's sword from Martha's Vineyard, where he was staying. Amy fully expected to puzzle Dr. Hough with this queer thing, when he next came out; but she could n't catch the doctor. He knew at the first glance what it was. Amy brought home some owl's feathers that she picked up near the owl's cage at the Zoo, expressly to try them on Dr. Hough; but it was of no use. He knew them at a glance. He knew exactly how the quills of the various bird tribes were shaped, and how the feathers grew on the quills, and their peculiar markings. He was full of stories about animals.

Amy had noticed, in the spring, great flocks of black birds flying over the house early in the morning toward the northeast, and toward night the same

flock of birds flying heavily back again, to the southwest. Their coming and going was as regular as if timed by the clock. She asked the doctor about them.

"Those must be the Hilltop crows," said Dr. Hough. "There are many hundreds of them that have made their winter home for years on the place known as Scarlet Oaks. Their nests are built in the great oaks there. The owner feeds them some grain in the winter, I think. When you see them going over in the morning, they are flying to their feeding-place up the Mill Creek and Miami valleys. They find seeds there, probably. It would interest you to go over to Scarlet Oaks some night about sundown, and see them come home. I have been there, and it is a sight worth seeing."

The doctor brought Amy a huge fossil ammonite, some rattlesnake fangs preserved in a little bottle, and also a rattlesnake's rattle, a piece of photographic stone from Colorado, some stones carved by the Indians, a mammoth's tooth, and many other treasures. Her mother gave her some Indian arrow-heads that Grandpa May had picked up in his own garden in Massachusetts; and Sister Faith, who had been to Roan Mountain, sent her mica and garnets, and slag from the iron mines.

"I see plainly that we shall have to build a larger house soon," said Professor Strong, "at the rate Amy's collection is growing. This house is not going to contain it long."

Dr. Hough told the children about a curiosity store on Central Avenue in the city. This store proved to be a most fascinating place. It was a little dark,

dingy room, with a sepulchral smell, full of the queerest, most uncanny-looking objects preserved in bottles of alcohol, or hanging up in dark cases. It was like some of the queer places Dickens describes; and it was almost a shock to have a quite young, modern-looking man appear behind the counter to wait on you.

But such trilobites, such Indian arrow-heads and spears, such fossils, such mound relics and curios of all sorts as the little store contained; and such a price as the owner demanded for them! His prices were never in the least behind the times.

No more money was wasted on candy or other frivolities by the collectors for a while after the discovery of this store. Every penny was hoarded to be spent in "curiosities." Amy succeeded in buying a shark's tooth and a dried sea-horse, while Elliot bought arrow-heads, star-fish, and trilobites, and pined in vain for a too expensive huge tarantula, preserved in alcohol. Taking a hint from the store, however, he preserved two little garter snakes that Mr. Green killed, in alcohol, generously giving Amy one,—an addition to her collection that she prized, although she was careful to tuck it behind other things, so she should not see it.

Nora gave Amy some dried heather, from Ireland, and a large star-fish that a cousin brought over to Nora from the old country. Even Mr. Green caught the fever, and kept his eye open for odd stones as he was digging, to give the children. One day he gave Amy an odd pointed stone.

"I disremember 'zactly when I did pick that stone up, it's so long ago," said Mr. Green. "'T was down

in old Kaintuck, 'pears to me like ten years ago. It seemed so sorter curus I've always kept it; but now I'll give it to you, Rabbit."

He also told a marvellous tale of pumpkins turned into stones, which, he said, were quite common "down in Kaintuck."

Amy was sure this pointed stone was the end of some fossil creature's tail; but Dr. Hough destroyed this fond hope by declaring it a polyp coral.

The collection mania had immensely enlarged the children's horizon, and opened their eyes to a great new world. They awoke to the fact that all around them, even to the ground under their feet, was a world of wonders,—wonders that could never be exhausted. New reverence for the power and greatness of God, the Creator, insensibly filled their minds. When Amy rode now on the Martin Cable, through the great cuts on that road, where wealthy syndicates were cutting down the great hills and carting them into the valleys, working such a transformation that the astonished land did not know itself, with unfailling interest did she view the layers of stone thus laid bare in the hillsides,—stones that had once been the shells of fish at the bottom of the sea, stones to the making of whose every layer had gone countless centuries. Sometimes Amy could count twenty or thirty of these layers, one above the other; and her young mind was filled with awe as she strove to stretch it back over the millions of years thus pictured before her eyes on the hillside.

There was much talk about this time of an excursion to the famous Serpent Mound in Adams County. This excursion never came to pass. The children

were all ready and anxious for it; but the grown people, in a tiresome way they have, were always "too busy," and said, "some other time." Nor did the Ohio River ever happen to reach exactly the right stage of lowness, when Dr. Hough was at leisure, to favor the much-talked-of trip to Ludlow. But there was another delightful excursion that deserves a whole chapter to itself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A TRIP TO THE FARM.

A MY had succeeded in wringing a reluctant consent from her father to her accepting Elliot's proposed gift of the chickens.

"Only three tiny little bantam chickens, papa," she said. "They will be so cunning, and they won't be any trouble at all. I'll feed them and take care of them. I shall love to do it."

"Hens are always a nuisance on a place," said the professor. "They will be a nuisance to the neighbors too, I fear."

"Oh, no, papa. Elliot is coming over to help me mend the fence of our old chicken-yard, so they can't get out."

"They will soon be an old story to you," said her father; "and then who will take care of them?"

"I shall never tire of them. Only try me and see, papa."

"Well, as I see you have won your mother over to your side, and I am in a decided minority, I shall have to consent, I suppose, against my better judgment."

"I feel this way about it, Daniel," said Mrs. Strong. "I favor anything that will keep Amy outdoors and away from her books and drawing. I think the chickens will be a healthy diversion for her. Three

little bantams cannot be a very great trouble, I am sure."

"I fear it will be the old story of the camel's nose over again," said the professor. "You know the camel humbly begged the privilege of putting only his nose under the edge of his master's tent to shelter it from the storm. But, this being granted, gradually he encroached farther and farther, until the whole camel was in the tent, crowding out the owner himself. Amy's collection is growing to be quite a good-sized camel, and the hens will probably be another. But I will try to endure them, since Amy's heart is so set upon them."

Papa smiled affectionately at Amy, and Amy smiled back again.

"Papa is *so* nice," she thought, with a cheerful confidence in his love and indulgence.

The Carmans owned a farm down the Ohio River, about ten miles below Cincinnati. This farm was Mr. Carman's hobby and delight. He was the founder and head of one of the most prominent mercantile firms in the Southwest. Hence he could afford to luxuriate in farming to his heart's content. Here his ardent love of nature, his delight in seeing things grow, in fancy stock, and agricultural experiments, could all be gratified; and here he found refreshment from the toils and cares of his large business. To Mr. Carman's mind there was no greater pleasure than taking the reins of a pair of his own high-blooded colts on a fine afternoon, and driving his family, or perhaps a fortunate party of friends, down the river road to "the farm," as it was always called, as if there were but one.

The river road lay, in the first part of its course, among a bewildering tangle of railroad tracks; and if, perchance, a snorting engine made the spirited colts stand on their hind legs and paw the air, Mr. Carman enjoyed the little episode much more than did his lady friends. The Carmans' table was kept supplied with a profusion of the freshest fruits and vegetables from the farm; and, being the most generous of families, this profusion was often shared by their friends.

In a part of the farmhouse dwelt the head farmer and his family. The rest had been furnished by the Carmans, so that they could pass a few days or weeks there in semi-picnic fashion whenever they felt inclined. In summer time parties to "the farm" were always in order.

Amy had been down to the farm more than once, and knew well all its delights. Her joy was therefore unbounded when Mrs. Carman came in one Friday morning in May to ask her mother and herself to join a picnic party to the farm the next day.

"Rose is going with us," said Mrs. Carman. "She and her friend Lida Lawrence are going down to sketch. Fred Lawrence is going too; and I am going to ask Kitty and Rob, so Amy will have one girl to keep her company. We will take part of our luncheon with us, and get the rest on the farm."

Mrs. Strong, who was fond of the country, and especially glad of this all-day outing in the fresh country air for Amy, after expressing her pleasure in going, asked, —

"When do you start?"

"We will meet at the Grand Central Station," said

Mrs. Carman, "in time to take the nine o'clock train down."

When Amy came home from school, she danced for joy all around the room at the good news.

"To have Kitty go too!" she said. "What a good time we shall have! And now I can have my chickens."

Elliot came running over at noon to say,—

"I'll be right over, Amy, as soon as school is out, to help you fix up the chicken-yard."

"All right," said Amy. "I'll be getting everything ready."

Elliot had a large flock of chickens on his mother's place, the cause of much suffering to his Grandma Gaylord; but none of these could he spare. Besides, he well knew that there was an unlimited supply of chickens, as of everything else, at the farm.

The children hammered and pounded away all the afternoon on the old chicken-yard back of the Strong's stable, built some years ago, when Philip had a turn of the hen fever. Amy had a little box of carpenter's tools of her own, and loved to try her hand at carpentry, while Elliot was full of mechanical genius, and liked nothing better than making something. The chicken coops with which he had filled his mother's back yard were quite wonderful specimens of architecture, though Grandma Gaylord failed to admire them. She even said,—

"Maria, Elliot is ruining this place, with his coops and chickens littered all over it."

"The boy must do something, mother," said Mrs. Carman. "So long as he does n't do anything worse than build coops, we must try to put up with it."

Elliot and Amy were perfectly happy this pleasant May afternoon, talking as they worked, building air castles about Amy's chickens that rose as fast as the new coop. They hammered away, nailing on strips and pieces of board over every hole where the slyest chicken might be imagined trying to squeeze through. If iron could make anything strong, that coop was strong, for they pounded into it the whole contents of Professor Strong's large nail-box.

The rear stall in the stable was fenced off with lath for a roost,—an arrangement dating back to Philip's day. There was a little door in the rear, about ten feet from the ground.

"We must make a ladder for the chickens to go up to roost on," said Elliot.

"Why, they 'll fly up, won't they ?" said Amy.

"No," said Elliot, who was wise with much chicken wisdom. "They fly down ; but they must have a ladder to walk up on."

"How cunning it will be to see them go up a ladder!" said Amy. "I can hardly wait till I get them."

Elliot made the ladder of a long strip of narrow board, across which he nailed little slats. This had just been successfully nailed in place, when Mrs. Strong came down to see how the young carpenters were progressing, and was startled to find Amy, who delighted to climb, up on this frail support, ten feet above the ground.

"Amy," she exclaimed, "come down instantly. If that board should give way, you might be seriously hurt."

"I was only trying the chicken ladder to see if it was strong," said Amy.

"A chicken does n't weigh quite so much as you," said Mrs. Strong.

"Have n't we fixed the coop and yard beautifully?" said Amy, coming down and looking with admiration on the work she and Elliot had at last completed.

"It certainly seems very strong," said Mrs. Strong, smiling at the funny patchwork of boards and strips that looked so child-like.

"Papa will think it is very nice, I know," said Amy.

Mrs. Strong did not feel so sure of her husband's admiration, but said nothing to cloud Amy's satisfaction.

Kitty and Rob were as delighted as Amy, and indeed Elliot, who could never go there often enough, at the prospect of a whole day at the farm. They spent the evening laying their plans and talking things over, and went to bed unusually early, in order to rise bright and early the next morning.

In spite of the children's having tempted fate by saying to each other, "What if it should rain to-morrow!" Saturday morning was as bright and lovely a May day as was ever seen. There was much calling back and forth from the Clovers' windows to Amy's.

"Oh, Kitty, chickens!" expressed Amy's rapture.

Mrs. Strong took an old gingham dress and old hat down that Amy might be free to play as hard as she chose, without thought of her clothes; and Mrs. Clover made a similar package for Kitty. Long before Mrs. Strong had packed her baskets, Amy, hat on, with a large covered basket on her lap, sat on the front porch, impatient to start. Rob and Kitty soon joined her. Poor Duke came over, too, evidently thinking he was to be one of the party.

"This basket is to bring my chickens back in," said Amy. "Peep, peep! I can almost fancy I see them now;" and she lifted the cover and peeped into the basket.

"Seems to me we are going to be late for the train," said Rob.

"I know it," said Amy. "I do wish mamma would hurry."

Mrs. Strong now appeared, bringing two baskets, one of which Rob was prompt in offering to carry for her. She said,—

"You need not be anxious, children, for if we miss the nine o'clock train, we can take the next. There is a train at half-past nine."

"But think of losing half an hour of the farm!" exclaimed Amy.

The children's fears were groundless, for they had to wait some time at the station before appeared, first, Miss Lida Lawrence, sketch-book and paint-box in hand, and her brother Fred, a boy two years older than Elliot, bearing a heavy lunch-basket; and then Mrs. Carman, Rose, and Elliot, quite laden down with baskets and packages.

It was a very jolly party in the car going down. Mrs. Strong and Mrs. Carman, who were great friends and great talkers, and who, whenever they met, never quite finished all they had to say, sat in a seat together, and made the most of this opportunity. Before them two seats were turned facing each other, and here were packed in the five children, full of talk and smiles and laugh and happiness. The young ladies had a seat in front of the children. Hardly had the train started when a young gentleman ap-

peared, and sitting down before the young ladies, seemed to be trying to make himself agreeable, not without success, judging by the laughter of the girls."

"Who is that young gentleman talking to your sister?" asked Amy.

"It is Mr. Tom Paisley," said Elliot. "He's always coming to our house. I like him better than most of the fellows that come to call on Rose, because he has some sense. He likes to look at my collection, and sometimes he brings me things for it."

Rose Carman was so bright, so pretty, and so good, that if she had been cast away on a desert island, young men would immediately have sprung up around her on the spot, so her mother was not surprised at the appearance of Mr. Paisley. He soon came discreetly back and made himself agreeable to Mrs. Carman, not forgetting to exchange a few words with his friend Elliot; and it developing that he had no pressing business on hand, and was pining for country air, he was invited to join the party.

"I'm glad of that," said Elliot, "for now we shall have some one to help carry the baskets."

It seemed as if the train never would emerge from the maze of city streets, tall factories, and provokingly long lines of freight cars, that cut off all view. But at last they came out into the open, and there was the Ohio, quite close to the track, with ferry-boats plying across its broad yellow current, valiant little tugs pushing long rows of coal-boats loaded to the water's edge, and a great river steamer puffing by, headed for New Orleans,—the whole an animated panorama that interested the children. Across the river rose the Kentucky hills, lovely in all

the tender green and freshness of May. From the ferries, roads were seen to wind temptingly up and disappear among the green hills.

"The river is pretty high," said Elliot. "It will be a good while before Dr. Hough can take us hunting for trilobites."

"Oh, Elliot," said Amy, giving her imagination rein, "I believe I see one now, sticking out of the bank over there."

"Pshaw!" said Elliot; "that's only a dead stick; some brush lodged."

They left the train at "Ackerman's," a little station-house standing alone in the green fields, as quiet as a country schoolhouse. They were the only persons visible except the station-master, in his shirt-sleeves, who returned to his work in a field near by as the train disappeared down the road.

Mr. Paisley at once justified Elliot's good opinion of him by taking possession of the two heaviest baskets.

"It is quite a walk up to the farm, and the sun is hot," said Mrs. Carman, "so we will take it easily, and not hurry."

But this was not Elliot's programme. He sped ahead, the other children trying to keep up with him, in almost as big a hurry to get to the farm as he; but the sun beat down with great warmth on their backs.

"Hold up, Elliot," said Fred. "Don't go so fast. This basket is heavy, I tell you."

"That's so," said Rob, whose face was red under his straw hat. "Slow up a little, can't you?"

"I'm in a hurry to get there," said Elliot. "There's some new calves I have n't seen yet."

"Well, you're not afraid they'll grow up into cows before we get there, are you?" asked Fred, who was a stout boy on whom exercise told.

This made all the children laugh, and Elliot slackened his pace.

"How pleasant it is down here," said Kitty, "and how sweet the air is! It smells of flowers."

"Don't you feel let out?" asked Amy. "There is so much room. Edgeton is country-ish, but this is the real country itself. I do love the country. What fun we will have to-day!"

"I'd rather be on the farm than anywhere else," said Elliot, and every one believed him.

Meantime they had walked up a green lane from the main road, and now came to a stile. Over this they climbed into a grassy field. Then they went across the field, across the garden, by a pasture yard, where a dozen fine cows were grazing, past one of the big barns, and there at last was the little white farmhouse nestled down under its tall poplars. Back of it rose a steep high hill, crowned on the summit with fine woods, from among which, to the south, peered the walls of a large stone building, looking like some old-world castle. Amy thought this very romantic, like stories she had read, and was rather disappointed to learn that her castle, which might have been full of enchanted ladies, was really a convent.

The farmhouse stood on rising ground, and from its porch the view was wide, over smiling fields and woods and orchards. No other house was in sight, save the convent, far above. Overhead was the wide blue sky, undimmed by any one's chimney smoke. No

wonder the children felt "let out" in all this free expanse.

They were decidedly the advance-guard of the party, coming in upon the farmer's wife, who was making bread, before the older people were even in sight.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Schwab," said Elliot. "We're awful thirsty. Is there any ice-water?"

"No; and I can't take my hands out of the bread just now to make any," said Mrs. Schwab, a fat, good-natured German woman. "But if you will take some tumblers and go down to the spring-house, you can get a cool drink."

The children followed Elliot down two or three steps, into the spring-house, which had been dug out of the side of the hill, and was made still cooler by a large maple that overhung its low roof. A spring that gushed out of the hillside was conducted across it in a shallow trough, in which sat pans of milk and crocks of butter. The water was deliciously cool, and so was the temperature of the spring-house after their warm walk; and they lingered there, bathing their faces in the cool stream that flowed from the end of the trough. Here the mothers found them when they too at last came up. But Mr. Paisley and the young ladies dawdled incredibly along the way, and displayed a lack of enthusiasm about getting to the farm that surprised the children.

"Bring all your baskets in here where it is cool," said Mrs. Carman, leading the way into a large room that served as both parlor and dining-room. "You children can all scatter about now, and do what you like, so long as you don't get into any mischief.

When luncheon is ready I will ring a bell, and you must all come promptly."

"They will hardly need much urging, judging by their present appetites," said Mrs. Strong, for the hungry boys were already calling for "something to eat."

"The farm is always a great place for an appetite," said Mrs. Carman. "Fortunately, we have enough provisions with us for any emergency."

Amy and Kitty hurried to change their dresses, and then ran off to find the boys, who, sandwiches in hand, had gone to the barn.

The young ladies, with the useful Mr. Paisley to carry their paint-boxes and sketch-books, climbed the hill back of the house, and found a pleasant seat in the shade of a large oak, halfway up, where there was a charming view of the river valley, the river itself, and the picturesque Kentucky hills,—a scene the young ladies proposed transferring to their sketch-books. Mr. Paisley was evidently a young man of strong artistic tastes, so well contented did he seem, stretched on the grass in the shade near Miss Rose, admiring the painting as it went on.

Mrs. Carman and Mrs. Strong sat on the porch until cool, and then, donning two of the old shade-hats which Mrs. Carman kept at the farm for the use of herself and friends, sauntered down into the orchard, whence there was a lovely view of the river. Here they sat chatting, and breathing the fragrance of the pink apple blossoms that hung over their heads.

Not in these languid fashions were the children enjoying themselves. There were so many delightful things to be done, they hardly knew where to

begin. The girls found the boys at the barn, admiring two pretty little calves, of some rare imported breed.

"These calves are as tender as babies," said Elliot, "and you have to be just as careful of them. This one was sick last week, and they gave it arnica, and fed it something out of a bottle, just like a baby."

"They are so cunning," said Kitty; "I wish I had one for a pet."

"I guess you don't know what you are talking about," said Elliot. "Why, papa was offered a thousand dollars for this calf as soon as it was born."

"Whew!" said Fred. "I'm afraid to stay near anything so valuable."

"You need n't laugh, Fred Lawrence; it's so. And papa refused the thousand dollars. He is going to raise it himself."

"Let's get away from here quick," said Fred. "What if I should happen to kill that calf accidentally? Can't we play on the hay?"

"Yes, of course we can," said Elliot. "Come on."

One of the mows in the big barn was still quite high. Climbing up on a staging, the children reached the top of this mow, and vied with one another in seeing who could jump farthest on the barn floor below.

The girls were not outdone by the boys; but presently Amy, taking a flying leap, fell on the floor in a heap, with a cry of pain.

"Are you hurt, Amy? What's the matter?" cried the others, running to help her.

Amy rose, holding her cheek, which was red and

bruised, tears in her eyes, but putting on a brave smile.

"My knee bumped into my cheek awful hard," she said, "but I guess it will feel better pretty soon."

"Come to the pump and put some water on it," said Elliot.

Here one of the hired men appeared and told Elliot he mustn't climb on the hay, as the fastidious horses would not eat it if trampled on.

"I don't care about any more jumping, anyway," said Fred. "It's too warm work this hot weather."

"Nor I," said Rob. "My back is all full of hay-seed now."

"I'm very sure I've had enough of jumping for a while," said Amy.

Out in the barnyard, a big farm-wagon was standing. The boys gave the girls a ride in that. Then they all went to see the chickens. There were many motherly old hens with big flocks of cunning little chickens, not shut up in coops, but clucking about in the wide freedom of the whole farm. The children particularly admired the white bantams. They were so tame that Elliot easily caught three,—a tiny rooster and two little hens,—and put them in a coop, that they might be ready to go into Amy's basket when she went home. Amy could hardly realize that these treasures were really hers, and found it difficult to tear herself away from them.

"Come on, Amy," said Kitty. "The boys are going down to see the horses. Those chickens will keep; they can't get away."

"I know it," said Amy; "and I don't have a whole day on the farm very often. But they are so sweet."

Away she raced with Kitty, after the boys, down through one edge of the orchard to the horse-pasture. No horses were in sight.

"You girls stay here," said Elliot; "and we boys will find the horses and drive them up."

"Let's get on the fence," said Kitty.

The girls perched themselves on the top rail of the high fence,—a pleasant seat in the sweet shade of blossoming apple boughs, with a glimpse of the great river through the leaves.

Presently there was a whooping and halloing in the distance, and from behind a clump of woods up the hill galloped six or eight young horses, with the boys not far behind. They were high-blooded Kentucky horses, with glossy dark skins, slender of limb, graceful and beautiful, with tossing manes, spirited eyes, and quivering nostrils, and they charged straight at the fence. The girls hastily scrambled down on the other side.

"You needn't be afraid of them," said Elliot. "They're as gentle as kittens, and they're used to being petted. They think you will feed them."

The girls soon found that Elliot spoke truly. The horses, wild and high-spirited as they looked, ate out of their hands, and seemed to enjoy being patted and stroked as much as the children enjoyed petting them. They seemed so gentle that Fred, who was stroking the nose of a high-spirited bay, felt moved to say,—

"I've a good mind to hop on this old fellow's back. I don't believe he would mind it, and I could hang on by his mane easily enough, anyway."

"Now, you'd better not do anything of the sort,"

said Elliot. "You'd find yourself over his head so quick you would n't know what had happened to you. If it did n't hurt you, it might injure the colt. Papa would n't like it."

The question was, luckily for Fred, decided at that moment by the horses themselves, who, suddenly startled by some sound or movement, threw up their heads, and dashed away, the cantering hoofs shaking the ground, disappearing behind the woods.

The children climbed about in the apple-trees for a while,—trees which seemed to grow expressly for climbing. Then they found some long boards near the fence. One of these, put across the fence, made a capital teeter. The two girls and Rob, on one end, exactly balanced Elliot and Fred on the other, Elliot's slimness being quite made up by Fred's stoutness. They seesawed up and down with great pleasure until the distant tinkle of a bell was heard.

"Lunch!" shouted Fred, jumping off the teeter without warning, thus letting the other end down with a thud that jarred the bones of Rob and Amy, while Kitty, who was on the end, hit her head against a stone as she fell.

"I declare, that's too bad," said Fred. "I did n't mean to do that. I did n't think, I was so hungry."

Kitty laughed and said her forehead did n't hurt much, although a lump was already swelling up on it, and away they all raced for the house. As they ran, the convent bell rang musically out from the height above.

"That sounds like 'Monastery Bells,' that Faith plays," said Amy.

The luncheon was delightful, having all the infor-

mality of a picnic combined with the comforts of chairs, a table, and table-cloth, plenty of dishes, and a cool, pleasant room to eat in. The farmer's wife, Mrs. Schwab, had made some fragrant coffee; and there were great pitchers of delicious creamy milk fresh from the spring-house, all they could drink, and sweet butter from the spring-house too. This, with their own rolls and sandwiches, veal loaf and Saratoga chips, pickles, jelly, olives and devilled eggs, cake and cookies, made an excellent luncheon, especially for children who had eaten an unusually early breakfast, and been playing hard in the fresh air ever since.

Fred made Mrs. Carman and Mrs. Strong laugh by exclaiming, after the first edge of his hunger had been taken off,—

“Amy and Kitty can climb almost as well as boys.”

“Of course they can,” said Mrs. Carman. “Girls are not to be outdone by boys in anything, these days.”

“This is called the woman's age, Fred,” said Mrs. Strong, “and the girls are climbing hard and fast, in many ways. They will go ahead of the boys yet, if the boys do not exert themselves.”

“No girl can outclimb me,” said Fred, proudly, as a half-egg disappeared at one mouthful.

After luncheon the children discovered that Mrs. Schwab had an interesting family of four kittens, and a cunning baby just beginning to toddle about; and they were content to stay on the porch in the shade for a while and play with the baby and kittens, thus doing Mrs. Schwab a good turn by keeping the

baby out of her way while she washed the dishes. Then they went out to see the flock of young turkeys, the first they had ever seen, and some little pigs that were found "too cunning," from whom it was hard to tear themselves away. Elliot took them to see the acre covered with thriving strawberry plants, and other acres covered with choice varieties of blackberries and raspberries. All were white with starry blossoms that gave promise of abundant good times coming for the Carmans and their friends, and made the children feel that they should much enjoy a trip to the farm in berry time.

Here too they saw a field of alfalfa growing, Mr. Carman considering this California grass particularly nourishing for stock. There had been no end to Mr. Carman's experiments. He made Catawba wine, among other things; and the hillside back of the farmhouse was terraced halfway up, and set thick with thrifty young vines, covered now with swelling leaf-buds.

"If we mean to get any wild flowers to take home, it is time we were picking them," said Elliot. "There's lots of them up on the hill, in the edge of the woods."

Up the hill toward the woods at the top, the children pressed, although it was so steep it made their legs ache, and the sun beat hot on their backs. At the top they sat down in the edge of the woods to rest and cool themselves. The view well repaid them for the climb. Below lay "the farm" and other farms, — a smiling prospect of fertile fields green with the freshness of spring, and woods lovely in all the delicate hues of May foliage. There was a long

stretch of the broad Ohio in sight, with here and there a steamboat stemming its yellow current. The Kentucky hills bounded the southern view; and over all was the broad expanse of blue sky across which soft white clouds drifted lazily.

"The sun shines in my eyes so I can hardly see," said Fred. "It is getting down in the west."

"I guess we'd best hurry and pick our wild flowers if we want any," said Rob, "or we may have to go home without them."

"There comes a train now," said Kitty.

The children stopped to watch the train, winding along through the landscape below, looking like a toy train, its dark smoke still lingering on the air long after it had disappeared, and then fell to picking the pretty flowers which grew in great patches here and there in the shelter of the woods. Besides the smaller flowers, they broke off branches of the glowing red bud, and even some boughs of apple blossoms, until they could carry no more. As they started down the hill, their speed was hastened by a shout from the two mothers below, who were waving handkerchiefs and beckoning. The children ran.

"You must hurry as fast as you can," cried Mrs. Carman, as soon as they were within hearing. "It is late, and we may miss the train. Mr. Paisley and the girls have gone on to the station now."

"Oh, dear!" said Amy, "I'm sorry to have this day come to an end."

"So am I," came in a chorus from the others.

"But then I shall have my chickens," said Amy.

"We'll help you carry them, Amy," said Rob.

"Oh, thank you, but I can carry them myself," said Amy, jealous of this precious privilege.

There proved to be enough for every one to carry, however, for Mrs. Carman had filled all the baskets with freshly cut asparagus to be taken home. The girls reluctantly took off the torn and dirty gingham in which they had had so much fun; the boys were made to wash and brush themselves into some faint resemblance of civilized beings, and then the party hurried toward the station.

Suddenly a distant whistle was heard, while they were still in the lane.

"There's the train now," said Mrs. Carman.

By common impulse, they all began to run, although knowing it was useless. The train only stopped an instant, and was disappearing far up the track when the company, puffing and panting, straggled up on the platform of the little station, where Mr. Paisley and the young ladies were waiting for them.

"I am so glad we missed the train," said Amy.

"So am I," said Kitty.

"So am I," said Mr. Paisley, laughing.

The artists now amused themselves by sketching Mr. Paisley, with his hat trimmed with flowers. Amy finally consented to deposit on the platform the precious basket holding the three bantams, and join the other children in a walking-match on the rails of the track, while the mothers kept a vigilant eye and ear open for a possible freight train.

It was really very pleasant, it seemed so peaceful and quiet, so far from the noisy world, so unlike a railroad station. There was no one there but themselves, no sound but the birds singing their good-

night songs in the fields and woods around them. The sun had set, and the cool twilight was restful and refreshing.

By-and-by, to the children's regret, the far off whistle of another train was heard. They hastened to pick up their bouquets and baskets, and climbed on board as the train stopped, the subject of some friendly smiles on the part of the passengers aboard, who did not need to be told that this was a home-going picnic party. The unnatural quiet of the tired children spoke for that.

Not only the children, but some of the passengers sitting near, laughed when suddenly from Amy's basket, the bantam rooster was plainly heard to remark, in an encouraging tone, —

“Cutta-cutta-cut.”

“Do hear that dear boy,” said Amy. “He’s trying to comfort the hens, and keep up their spirits.”

It was seven o’clock by the time they had made the trip, not only to the city, but across it, and out home on the electric cars. The children were too tired to eat any dinner, but not to go down with Amy to her chicken-house, and help her introduce the bantams to their new home and watch them safely to bed on the roost. Then they gladly tumbled into bed, too tired even to dream of the delights of the long, happy day.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHICKENS.

A MY named the bantam rooster "King Ichabod," and the pretty little hens, not so large as doves, "Mrs. Cockletop" and the "Princess Rosette." She spent much time with them, studying their habits and dispositions. After seeing them go to roost, she came in to announce the interesting discovery that they "shut up their eyes from the bottom." The devout spirit with which they lifted their heads in drinking, as if in thanksgiving, was much admired.

"Amy Strong's chickens" became an object of interest to all the little children on the avenue, and Amy sometimes had more help in caring for them than she wanted. But she was gentle and pleasant to the little ones if they did bother her. Dixon was much absorbed by the chickens, and spent much time philosophically studying them. Amy was startled by finding him one evening in the stable, sitting alone, contemplating the roost, when she went down to see her flock the last thing at night.

"I have never seen a hen on the roost before," said Dixon.

Duke, who always chased chickens, seemed to know as well as any one that these were the property of his friend Amy, and not to be touched. He often

went down with her to feed them. When they were let out for air and exercise, he pricked up his ears and looked at them wistfully, evidently longing to send them cackling down the hill, but, looking up at Amy, wagged his tail, and said as plainly as dog could say,—

“ You can trust me, Amy.”

“ Good old fellow, good Duke,” said Amy, patting his head in reward of his virtue.

One night at dusk, Professor Strong happened to look out of the library window, and was dismayed to see lights moving about his stable.

“ This will never answer,” he said, and hastened down to see what was going on.

He found Kitty holding a kitchen candle in each hand, high up, to light the stable for Amy, who, far up on a ladder, was arranging the chickens on the roost.

“ Amy,” said her father, “ this is very dangerous. This will never do. A spark might set the stable on fire, and we should forfeit our insurance, besides the danger of the fire spreading to the houses. What are you doing ? ”

“ I’m putting the chickens to bed, papa.”

“ Entirely unnecessary. They will not thank you for it. They would much rather go to roost by themselves.”

“ The trouble is, papa, that King Ichabod is partial to Mrs. Cockletop, and he always will roost beside her, and leave poor Princess Rosette all alone, and I don’t think it’s right. Such a beautiful chicken as Princess Rosette is, too. I think he ought to roost between them, and I’m putting him there.”

"You must use a lantern after this," said her father, laughing, as the chickens submitted to be handled and put wherever Amy wished.

They were so tame that they ate out of her hand, and let her carry them about, to the admiration of the other children. When she opened the corn barrel, King Ichabod was wont to fly in; and it being impossible to "shoo" him out, the only way was to lift him out bodily. He was a most consequential little body, strutting around, rending the air and every one's ears by his shrill, discordant notes of defiance to all the big roosters of the neighborhood. He crowed so mightily he almost tipped over backwards. But his shrill notes were music in Amy's ears.

"Do hear that King Ichabod! Is n't he a dear?" was her frequent remark. She could crow in perfect imitation of him, and one of her amusements was to crow and make him answer her. The childish voice out in the summer air, crowing gayly, sounded so happy that Mrs. Strong often said,—

"I am really glad we let Amy have the chickens, she takes so much comfort with them."

One day, Amy, just home from school, having run down to see the chickens the first thing, came racing into the house out of breath with running and excitement.

"Great news!" she panted. "What do you think? Mrs. Cockletop has laid an egg! See, what a little beauty."

Opening her hand, she displayed a pretty little white egg.

"You might have that little egg cooked for your luncheon," said her mother, thinking it would please Amy.

"The idea, mamma ! I would n't think of such a thing. What would Mrs. Cockletop think of me if I ate her nice little egg ! I am going down this afternoon to see if she has laid another."

Amy was disappointed when her mother told her that hens never laid two eggs a day. "Although," said Mrs. Strong, "it was said of the hen of old Grimes, 'On Sundays she laid three,' but this is a tradition that has never been confirmed."

Amy would now eat no chicken.

"But, Amy, these are not your chickens," was urged in vain.

"No," said Amy ; "my chickens would know it if I ate chicken, and they would n't love me any more."

One day Amy came in to report,—

"Oh, mamma, what do you think ? Mrs. Cockletop will not get off of her nest. She stays there all the time. I thought she must be sick, but Elliot says she is setting, and that she wants I should put some eggs under her, and then she will hatch out some little chickens. Won't that be delightful ?"

Elliot was a high authority on the subject of chickens, and often came over to advise Amy.

"I'm not sure about it's being wholly delightful," said Mrs. Strong.

"But may I set her ?" asked Amy. "I should so love to have some cunning little chickens."

Her mother having consented, though with what Amy felt a painful want of enthusiasm on such an interesting subject, Amy set the hen on five bantam eggs, all she had, and four eggs from Esmond's grocery, of some unknown breed. Mrs. Cockletop was barely able to cover this mixture of nine eggs.

But being a determined little body, she bent all her energies to the task, and did her best. The Princess Rosette was also set soon after.

"I can hardly wait three whole weeks to see my little chickens," said Amy. "It seems like years."

Amy had lately discovered a new way of coming home from school that pleased her greatly, because it "seemed so adventurous and country like," she said, and also because she could walk the first part of the way with her cousin Marguerite, thus bringing up some of the arrears of talk the girls never found half enough time for at school. After parting with Marguerite, she took a cross street or two that brought her into Brook Street. Here there was a convenient gap in the fence, which let her into the field that joined her father's place in the rear. Running down the hill, she had only to climb the fence, jump the brook, and there she was at home, able to call on the chickens conveniently as she passed their abode. She lent interest to the new road in her own way.

"I've named all the places along my way," she told her mother. "The corner of Briggs Street and Ash Avenue I call Breeze Point, because the wind always blows my hat off there if I'm not careful. The first corner of Brooks Street is Apple Corner, because I always begin to eat my apple there. Where I climb the fence is Point Lookout, and our hill is Chicken Hill."

How lovely every child looks to its mother! Mrs. Strong, laughing a little at her own foolish fondness, used nevertheless often to stand in the bay-window mornings to watch Amy going to school until the turn hid her from sight. The little figure with the

long bright hair floating out from under the jaunty brown hat, stepping along so lightly, now in the morning sunshine, now in the elm-trees' waving shade, looked so pretty to her. Amy always carried her slender form so erect and lightly, as if she walked to the sound of music unheard by grosser natures, — “to some tune by fairies played.”

Mrs. Strong was also quite apt to be sitting at the back library window when it was time for Amy to come from school, that she might catch through the trees the first glimpse of the bright little figure with the blue school bag, running down the opposite hill and up to the chicken-house.

At last, when the three weeks had expired to a day, as Amy well knew, after a longer tarry at the chicken-house than usual, she came in, saying joyfully, —

“Mrs. Cockletop has some little chickens at last! I saw two of them, the dearest, sweetest little things you ever saw. And there is the bill of another sticking out of an egg, — so cunning. I’m afraid it can’t get out. I wanted to pick the shell and help it out, but Mrs. Cockletop would n’t let me. You never saw any one so cross and unreasonable. She actually pecked my hand, when I only wanted to help her.”

“If you want her to hatch out the rest of the eggs, Amy, you must suppress yourself a little while longer,” said her mother. “Keep away, and leave Mrs. Cockletop to manage her own affairs.”

“I can’t wait to see them,” said Amy; “but I suppose I must.”

“I can tell you something to divert your mind,” said her mother, — “a very great piece of news.”

“Oh, what is it, mamma? Has papa bought a dog?”

"Hardly," said her mother, laughing. "I had a letter from Philip this morning, and he and Gladys are coming home to visit us. They will be here the last of this week."

"Oh, goody, goody, goody!" cried Amy, dancing around the room, so delighted she could hardly express her joy.

"Better yet," continued her mother, "Gladys is going to sing here, at the great concert at Music Hall, this week."

"Oh, how perfectly rapturous! Shall we go?"

"Of course we shall. They will only arrive in season for the concert, so we shall see Gladys for the first time when she comes on to sing in Music Hall."

"How interesting and exciting it will be! I wish Kitty and Irene could go with us."

"I should be very happy to take the girls, if their mothers consent."

Here Amy heard Kitty's voice outside, and dashed out the door, and rattled off the exciting news so fast, mixing chickens, company, and concert, that Kitty could hardly grasp it all at first.

Amy now had so much to occupy her mind that Mrs. Cockletop was allowed to hatch the rest of her brood in peace. She came off with a brood of six chickens, three bantams, and three of some larger breed. Amy named the bantams "Father Dorcas," "Mother Dorcas," and "the Lady Rowena," and the others "Cockletop Junior," and "Mr. and Mrs. Chickabod." The Princess Rosette soon came off with three chickens, which Amy named "Queen Anne," "Victoria," and "Rebecca." Elliot helped her build coops on the broad part of the driveway near the stable.

"I call that part of the driveway 'Palace Court,'" said Amy, "because Mrs. Cockletop and the Princess hold their court there."

At this popular court, receptions were always in order, Amy herself being in almost constant attendance out of school, while the children of the avenue could not sufficiently admire the cunning little chickens.

There was always a group of bright little heads and hats bobbing around the coops, and busy little fingers pushing choice offerings into the coops, or trying in vain to catch the dear chickens, who were, luckily, usually too spry for their admirers.

"What do you suppose I found Phyllis doing to-day, when I came home from school?" asked Amy. "As I came up the hill, I heard Mrs. Cockletop cackling so loud that I was afraid one of those wild cats under the stable had caught one of her chickens. I ran up there as fast as I could. There was Phyllis, working hard, poking something into the coop. It was a brick! Phyllis said she was putting it in for the old hen to sit down on. She thought she must be tired, standing up all the time!"

Amy particularly enjoyed seeing the hens put their children to bed. It gave her a peaceful feeling to see the old hen spread herself out comfortably, and gather her chickens under her wings, a restless little head sticking out from the soft feathers here and there, sometimes way up on her back, the mother quieting them with soft brooding notes.

"Hear her sing them to sleep," said Amy to Kitty, as the two friends squatted admiringly before the Princess's coop. "I suppose she is singing the hens'

‘Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber,
Holy angels guard thy bed.’”

“Hens don’t have angels,” said the practical Kitty. “
“You don’t know. They might,” said Amy.
“But when I go up to Our Land to-night, I shall
order the Bulusk to send four of my fairy guards
down here to protect them. They are dressed like
Brownies, you know. Won’t they look cunning,
standing each side of the coop ?”

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONCERT.

THE cherry season was always a time of activity and anxiety on Hillside Avenue,—activity on the part of the children, and anxiety on the part of the mothers, and also, it must be confessed, of the owners of cherry-trees. All the older places on the avenue were rich in cherry-trees, which produced abundantly. This year the cherry-trees up and down the avenue had been masses of white bloom, looking like giant bouquets scattered along the hillsides, or overhanging the sidewalk. The cherry season was evidently going to be abundant, and all the children were impatient for its coming.

For Amy and her intimate friends the time of waiting was beguiled by the excitement of the approaching visit of Philip and Gladys, and the much-anticipated concert. Amy had talked so much about Philip and his wife to Kitty, Irene, and the rest, that they felt a personal interest in the affair, almost as if it were their dear brother who was coming home after a long absence, and their new sister who was to sing at the concert.

The day of the concert came at last; and at last Amy, with her parents and Irene and Kitty, was sitting in Music Hall, in a state of much inward agitation. Amy was quite pale with excitement, and full of

nervous giggles. It was *her* concert. She felt the responsibility of it all, as it were, and so conspicuous that she insisted on attempting to conceal herself by sitting between Kitty and Irene. How wonderful it was to see the name in large letters on the programme,—

“GLADYS VAN DYKE.”

“I’m afraid Gladys will see me when she comes out to sing,” said Amy, feeling so diffident for Gladys that it seemed as if Gladys must share her feeling.

The opening orchestral numbers were played with masterly skill; but so far as Amy was concerned, and possibly Professor Strong and wife too, the exquisite melodies might as well have been the brazen blarings of a country brass band.

Then came the pause; the conductor departed. Amy’s heart seemed to stand still. Re-enter the conductor, escorting Gladys. A sweet young girl, simply but tastefully dressed, with wonderful great dark eyes that lent added beauty to a face full of charm,—such was Amy’s new sister.

“Isn’t she pretty? She is perfectly beautiful, Amy,” whispered Kitty and Irene on either side, while Amy’s heart, from seeming to stand still, now beat as if it would jump out of her altogether.

It was a moment of intense suspense as Gladys stood there quietly, with simply folded hands, while the orchestra played the prelude, and the crowded house waited breathlessly the first notes of the new singer. Music Hall was well known to be peculiarly trying to the voice. Voices good and ample in ordinary halls were lost in its vast space. What if

Gladys's voice should prove sweet, but weak and inadequate? What if she should be a failure!

The girlish figure looked so slight, so young, standing alone on the platform in the great hall, with every eye fastened on her, every opera-glass critically scanning her, her friends might well tremble for her.

But all fears vanished at the first notes of the glorious voice, that soared up above the orchestra with the ease and naturalness of a bird singing and swinging on a bough, and the simplicity which is the perfection of artistic finish,—a voice whose notes penetrated the remotest corners of Music Hall, yet so full, so rich, so sympathetic, that you drew a long breath of delighted satisfaction at the close. The applause that followed was tremendous. No one clapped longer or harder than Amy and her friends, freely sacrificing their gloves in the good cause.

The enthusiastic audience insisted on three encores. And now there was another excitement for Amy. Philip came out to play the accompaniment for these songs,—good old Philip, looking so natural, exactly as he did when he used to play "Peekabo" for Amy, long ago. How strange it was, after so many years' absence, to see him again first on the platform of Music Hall, as if he were anybody else!

The home-coming after the concert was a great happiness to every one. Philip was found to be the same dear Philip, just as good and kind and affectionate to his little sister and every one as of old; and Gladys proved a most fascinating person, as good and bright as she was pretty, and as lovable as she was lovely. Philip was so glad to be at home again; and both he and Gladys, after three years of Europe

and the constraint of hotels, boarding-houses, and public life generally, enjoyed greatly all the home cooking and comforts, the ease and unconstraint, that the very name "home" implies. They found much pleasure, too, in the freedom and delights of country life.

Amy brought in all her little friends to introduce to them; and Gladys and Philip entered with interest into their affairs, even attending a special performance of "*The Witch's Curse,*" given in the Strong's attic for their benefit. They went for wild-flowers with Amy; and, as Amy said, they "appreciated the chickens," and found much pleasure in feeding and watching the cunning little things. The Princess Rosette was now a funny sight with her family, who all proved to be of a larger breed, and threatened soon to outgrow her protecting care. When she tried to brood them under her wings, the little mother was tossed about by her turbulent youngsters, like a small boat on a stormy sea.

Philip renewed the pleasures of his youth by mowing the lawn; and Gladys helped rake up the grass, looking so pretty under the trees, with a picturesque hat on, that Mrs. Strong said it was like a scene from an opera. The Strong's now revelled in musical evenings, when Amy was allowed to sit up late, and when the neighbors all sat out on their porches or sauntered carelessly up and down in front of the house, to catch something of the exquisite music which overflowed from the Strong's parlor. It would not do to ask Philip to sing "*Peekabo*" now; indeed, Amy's own musical taste had improved somewhat since the old days, but she often teased him,—

"Philip, won't you please sing the laughing song?"

This was the solo from Faust, wherein Philip, as Mephistopheles, rendered the "Ha, ha," with so much power and such sneering, fiendish mirth that Mrs. Strong said he seemed really wicked for the time being. But Amy never tired of it.

A great thing that Philip did for Amy on this visit was to show her how to use her dollar camera, and to make her a capital "dark room" out of the closet under the stable stairs, fitting it up with shelves and all necessary conveniences for photography. To every one's surprise it was found that the little camera would actually take pictures, and very good ones too, not at all to be despised; so now Amy had a new and absorbing pursuit.

Philip took excellent pictures of Gladys and Amy in all parts of the grounds,—you could not put Gladys anywhere but that she made a pretty picture; and Amy took pictures of Gladys and Philip in many varied attitudes. She was delighted with this new pleasure.

"It is so fascinating," she said, "to develop the plates, when you begin to see the picture coming out dimly, and you never know what it will look like."

This was indeed true of Amy's photographs. There was a decided element of uncertainty about them. Once she took what would have been a beautiful picture of Irene, only, by mistake, she had used a plate on which was already a view of her house, so that when the plate was developed, to the great amusement of Amy and the other children, Irene appeared calmly sitting on top of Professor Strong's house.

She delighted Mr. Green by taking his picture,—a splendid success, only she had aimed the camera too low, and the upper part of his head was omitted. Professor Strong was induced to sit for his picture in one of the porch chairs on the lawn. The lawn sloped, and the camera was aimed rather low. Consequently the picture presented a fine view of the professor's boots, much enlarged, to which were attached a pair of unnaturally long legs, the professor's body and head diminishing away in the background.

But Amy was very persevering; and after a while she mastered the art, at least so far as to be able to take very pretty pictures of all her friends. She took a fine group of Kitty sitting on the ground with Duke lying across her lap, and Irene in a most dramatic position, and Kitty again, with Irene, Rob, and Bessie Paxton on the teeter; and as for Phyllis, Ronald, and Jack, they were taken on the garden-seat, and up in the cherry-tree, and lying in the tall grass, and in all conceivable groups and positions.

“I am more than suspicious that your dollar camera is going to be one of papa’s camels,” said Mrs. Strong one day. She was going into town, and Amy had modestly requested,—

“Won’t you please just step into Prince’s, mamma, and buy me another bottle of developer, and some blue paper, and some of the other kind, and some cards to mount my photographs on?”

“Is that all?” asked her mother, laughing.

“Why, I do need two more trays badly; and you might as well get a little proto-sulphate of iron, for that’s almost gone.”

"A dollar camera sounds very inexpensive," said Mrs. Strong; "but that is only the beginning of sorrows, it seems."

"But it is such fun, mamma."

This was an unanswerable argument, for Mrs. Strong could not refuse any reasonable happiness within her means to the bright young life that was the joy and sunshine of the house; and photography, keeping Amy outdoors so much, was a most healthful diversion for her.

Before Gladys and Philip returned to New York, they revealed a plan for the summer which, if carried out, would be, Amy felt, the crowning happiness of her life. Philip put it in this way,—

"In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, there is a town, Plymouth by name; you may possibly have heard of it."

"Oh, I know," burst in Amy, eagerly; "the Pilgrims landed there."

"Right," said Philip. "Now, we propose to imitate the Pilgrims, and land there ourselves, if all our plans come to pass. For in Plymouth there is a large pond,—in fact, there are several. But in this particular pond there is an island; and on that island there is a cottage, a furnished cottage, which the owner, being absent in California this summer, is willing to rent for a consideration. I am going down to see this island; and if it proves to be as desirable as I think, we shall take it for the summer. If we do, we shall want you all to come down and stay as long as you can. How would that suit you, Amy?"

"Oh, Philip," said Amy, whose eyes had been growing larger and more shining as Philip went on,

"I never heard of anything so delightful! To really live on an island! How romantic! How splendid! It's too good to come true."

"Perhaps not," said Philip. "We will see. I thought the scheme would suit you."

And when he and Gladys went away, Gladys waved her hand from the carriage window, and cried,—

"Good-by, until we meet on the island."

Amy's talk and dreams now were all of island life; and she passed her evenings drawing scenes in which her father was seen pulling impossible fish up into still more impossible boats, her mother, sitting under a convenient willow-tree on the water's edge, was reading or sketching, Gladys and Philip were rowing picturesquely about, while Amy herself was wading in the pond, or rowing a huge boat with an apparent speed that cast in the shade the best spurts of the Harvard crew.

CHAPTER XXI.

“CHERRIES RIPE.”

THE cherry season had come at last. Not by any means that the cherries were ripe. The boys of Hillside Avenue did not wait for that formality before opening the season. Cherries were so slow, and took their own time as deliberately as if trees full of birds, and a street full of boys, were not dying of impatience for them to ripen. The moment they showed a red spot on one side, the boys and the birds began on them.

Two of the largest and fullest trees on the street stood on Professor Evarts's place. Mrs. Evarts, who, though having no children herself, loved children, and was very kind to them, carefully considered the situation, and told her husband her conclusion.

“I think the best plan will be to make an agreement with the children. If they will wait until the cherries are fully ripe, they shall pick them for me on halves. I will gladly give them half.”

“An admirable plan,” said Professor Evarts, “if you can carry it out. But you must remember that ‘boys will be boys,’ especially on Hillside Avenue, where there are so many of them.”

True enough. Mrs. Evarts, long before the cherries were ripe, was shocked to find her trees alive with boys.

"Why, boys," she exclaimed, "it will kill you to eat those green cherries!"

But boys seem to have a wonderful power of surviving what ought to kill them, and live to grow up in spite of every one's warnings and predictions. Mrs. Evarts, finding that persuasion and argument did no good, was obliged to mount guard over her trees and sit on her porch most of the time out of school hours, in order to retain a few cherries for her own use.

Cousin Elizabeth was another sufferer, for she had three cherry-trees in her front yard close to the street, and there were no fences on Hillside Avenue, the houses being scattered along under the great trees, as in a park. Her place was subject to raids at all hours of the day, not only from the more untamed spirits among the neighbors' boys, but also from hordes of wild young hoodlums, barefoot and ragged, who seemed, like Job's war-horse, to "sniff the battle from afar," and say "Ha, ha," as they rushed to the fray, appearing now and then in swarms from some unknown region beyond Brook Street.

The walk and lawn were constantly littered with broken branches, torn leaves, and cherry-stones; and life was such a warfare that no wonder poor Cousin Elizabeth sighed for the cherry season to be over. She not only suffered from the raids of the outside barbarians, but also from the dread of losing her own children by the colic.

Ronald, being older, minded his mother, and kept out of the trees, although it cost a struggle. But Jack,—poor little Jack,—he meant to do right, but the temptation sometimes proved too great for his

young virtue. Often and often were his small knicker-bockers detected high up among the cherry leaves. Phyllis was too little to climb the trees, but Jack kindly dropped green cherries down into her outstretched gown, that she might share this luxury. Both were unmindful of the dreadful warning which Amy was much amused to hear Ronald, with his own mouth evidently watering, shout to them, —

“If you eat so many of those green cherries, you will have the cholera garbus!”

The moment the cherries would at all answer to gather, Cousin Elizabeth and Mrs. Evarts invited Amy, Kitty, Irene, and the other “good” children, who had obeyed them and let the trees alone, to a grand cherry-picking, one fine Saturday morning.

Amy was full of pleasant anticipations at the breakfast table that morning.

“We shall have such fun,” she said. “It is better than a picnic. I love to climb.”

“Do be careful, Amy,” said her mother, “and not climb too high, or step on limbs too small for your weight. Remember how Cecilia Bradstreet fell out of Dr. Trimble’s cherry-tree and broke her arm.”

Amy could not help laughing at this, for Miss Cecilia was now a pretty and elegant young society lady, and it took a great flight of imagination to fancy her up in Dr. Trimble’s cherry-tree. But the children of Hillside Avenue were still brought up on the tradition of this accident, it being an unanswerable argument on the mothers’ side.

“I will be careful, mamma,” said Amy. “You need not feel anxious a bit. You know it is natural for me to climb.”

So it was. It delighted Amy's poetical fancy to be high up above the earth, swaying on the green boughs like the birds; and she was at home in all the climbable trees on her father's place, especially one catalpa, whose low drooping branches made it a tree no child could resist.

This Saturday morning, the cherry-trees on the places of Cousin Elizabeth and Mrs. Evarts were alive with the biggest, brightest-hued birds ever seen in cherry-trees: birds in gay little hats and red, pink, and blue ginghams, and birds in knickerbockers and shirt waists, were all over them; and certainly the music of happy childish voices and laughter that rang out on the morning air was as sweet as bird songs.

The lower boughs had been well rifled, but, high above, the upper branches glowed red with the tempting fruit. This obliged the expert climbers to go to the very tip-top of the trees, almost out of sight among the green leaves, where, clinging to the swaying limbs, they dropped the cherries down on the grass for the smaller children to pick up.

"Dixon," called Amy from her look-out high up in the tree, "you don't pick up any for Cousin Elizabeth. You put them all in your own mouth."

"Mamma doesn't want him to eat so many cherries," said Claribel. "He had an awful stomach-ache last night. I shall go straight home and tell mamma of you, Dixon."

"Put some in your hat to carry home, Dixon, to eat to-morrow," said kind Cousin Elizabeth; and Dixon thought best to comply, well aware that his little sister would faithfully report him at home, if he persisted in eating the cherries.

Old Nannie hovered around, in a fever of anxiety that drove Victor to climb much higher up in the tree than he otherwise would have thought of doing, to show his independence of Nannie's rule.

"I know that child will fall and break his leg, or make himself sick eating so many cherries," she groaned; "but he won't stop for my telling him."

"You can take this comfort, Nannie," said Cousin Elizabeth: "if eating cherries were really fatal, there would not be a child living on Hillside Avenue to-day."

Amy brought down one beautiful branch, all hanging with shining red cherries, and ran home to give it to her mother, who said, —

"That is too pretty to eat, Amy. I will put it in a vase for an ornament."

And an ornament it remained until the next day, when, all the other cherries being eaten, Amy finished up the pretty branch, too.

Cousin Elizabeth and Mrs. Evarts carried their part of the spoil into their houses, and the children took theirs over under the big trees on the Strong's front lawn, where Amy had her croquet set. Here, sitting or lying on the green grass in the cool shade, they ate their cherries as they chatted away about their own affairs. Finally they fell to telling what they meant to be when they grew up.

"I'm going to be a sailor," said Ben Bruce, who had just been reading Dana's "Two Years Before the Mast."

"I'm going to be his partner," said Paul.

"What fun you will have!" said Amy. "But mine is best of all. I am going to be an artist and a poet and an authoress, when I grow up."

"Is that all?" asked Ben.

"You need n't laugh. I am," said Amy.

"Probably I shall be an actress; but anyway I intend to be a very fine lady, and I shall be perfectly *blasé*. Even if I care about anything, I don't intend to show a bit of interest," said Irene, who liked to astonish the other children sometimes by these advanced ideas.

"Pooh!" said Ronald, "I don't think that sounds like much fun. I mean to be a priest."

Ronald's mind was of the imaginative cast, and he had been much struck with the impressive ritual and robes of the Roman Catholic Church. He had confided before to Amy this resolve to be a priest, adding,—

"That's the reason why I can't marry you when I grow up, Amy. But you shall sing in my choir, and I will pay you five dollars a week more than I do any one else."

"I'm going to be a banker and get rich," said Jack, lying on his stomach in the grass, kicking his heels in the air as he ate cherries out of his hat in a spendthrift fashion that did not promise much for his future career as a banker.

"I shall be a newsboy, and sell papers on the train, so I can ride on the cars all the time," said Victor.

"I'm going to be a dog-trainer," said Elliot Carman.

"I'm going to be a circus-rider," said Rob. "Whoa! Get up there!" reining in an imaginary team of four bareback horses abreast.

"I'm going to be a school-teacher, so that I can whip the bad boys," said Kitty.

"We won't go to school to you," said Paul.

"Of course you won't. You will be off at sea then, won't you?"

Dixon now spoke up in his wise and solemn fashion.

"I am going to be a railroad engineer," he announced; whereat all the children laughed, for Dixon was certainly the last boy on the avenue one would pick out for the practical career of an engineer. But Dixon had a railroad of his own in mind, which he calmly proceeded to explain, never minding the laughter,—

"I shall have both sides of my track set out all the way with shade trees,—three kinds of trees, maples and elms and firs. But around the stations I will have fruit-trees set out. I shall keep two officers at each station to guard these trees, and right by the cherry-tree there will be a jail."

"Ho, ho!" shouted the boys, seeming to regard this as a thrust aimed at them.

"There will, now, so you must look out. I shall have at least fifty yard engines, to pull—"

"Oh, I'm tired of hearing about your old engines," said Claribel, who had recently had her hair cut off, and felt that the most important thing. "I think he ought to be a barber. It must be very nice to be a barber."

"I tell you what we will do," said Rob. "Let's all go over in our back yard and play circus."

John Robinson's circus, which always winters in Cincinnati, had recently opened its summer season there; and Rob, as well as most of the other boys, had attended it, so all were ready and willing to play circus.

"Circus" was a noisy play. Rob's long roller-coaster first figured as a band-wagon in the opening procession, that brought out the whole strength of

the company, the band consisting of Willie McGrau's drum and two harmonicons. The procession ended, Rob said, —

“Ladies and Gentlemen! The most wonderful trained horse in the world will now ride around the ring in a Roman chariot, drawn by six Arabian horses abreast.”

He tied Duke into the roller-coaster, — good-natured old Duke, who let the children do anything they pleased with him. The Arabian steeds were Rob, Ben, Paul, Ronald, Victor, and Jack, most prancing and spirited horses, hard for the charioteer, Elliot Carman, to keep abreast. Duke was drawn around and around the circle in the Clovers' driveway by the stable, amid loud applause from the audience, until even his good-nature gave out; his howls drowned the band and he had to be loosed, when he fled behind the stable, evidently having had quite enough of circus.

Then Rob said, —

“Now I will be the lady in the yellow satin dress, Madame What-you-call-her, the famous bareback rider. This roller-coaster is my bareback horse, a regular racer. Keep your eyes open now, for you will see some tall riding. You pull the coaster, Paul.”

Rob took a stick in his hand for a whip, and assumed a fixed, simpering smile, that set the boys in a roar, and made Kitty say, —

“Rob Clover! You look too silly for anything.”

“Can't help it,” said Rob. “That's the way the lady in the yellow satin dress looked. Let her go!”

Rob lashed his whip, and stuck one leg out straight, and away started Paul at a round pace.

"Hold on! Go slower!" cried Rob, but too late. Over he tumbled on his nose in the gravel.

"What made you go so fast, Paul?" asked Rob, in muffled tones from within the handkerchief with which he was sopping his bleeding nose. "Have n't you any sense?"

"You said the horse was a regular racer," said Paul; "and a racer would n't go poking along, it is n't likely."

"That's so," admitted Rob. "I tell you, it must take a lot of practice to learn to stand on one leg on horseback. I wish papa would buy a horse, so I could be practising now."

As Rob's bleeding nose obliged him to go into the house, the circus came to an untimely end; and the children found other sports to fill out "a whole Saturday."

In the afternoon, Amy, Kitty, Irene, and Laura undertook to play croquet under the trees on the Strong's lawn. The younger children on the street always liked to be where Amy was. Her mother sometimes said, —

"If there is n't a child in sight, let Amy go outdoors, and they seem to spring up out of the ground. It is nothing uncommon to see thirteen children on our lawn at once."

Sometimes Amy found this train of small hangers-on a bother, when she, Irene, and Kitty had important schemes of their own to carry out; but as she really loved these little friends, she was kind and patient with them, and always just, giving them their fair turn and share in all the sports.

The knocking of the croquet-balls was the signal

for all the smaller fry to rally around; and it was soon found impossible to play, with Dixon or Victor or Jack picking up a spare mallet and hitting whatever ball came handiest, and Claribel, Phyllis, and the little Goldschmidts and Paxtons scampering to and fro among the wickets.

"Here, Dixon, you must n't knock my ball out of place," said Kitty, making a vigorous descent on Dixon, and pulling him off of the croquet-ground. "What a bother these children are! They completely spoil our game."

"Indeed they do," said Laura. "We might as well give up the game if they won't go away."

"I think I can manage it so they will not trouble us," said Amy.

She took the four spare mallets and balls, and went farther back in the yard, followed by the troop of children.

"Now, children," she said, "these are your mallets and balls; and you may take them and have a nice game of your own if you will not bother us any more. Take turns now, and play fair."

"We will, Amy," said the little ones, delighted to have a game of their own.

As the little boys thought the science of the game consisted in knocking the balls as hard and high as possible, they were kept busy enough, hunting the balls, which rolled fast and far, down the hill into the tall grass, or into the mazes of the shrubbery, and the main croquet game progressed finely, no longer interrupted.

By-and-by, not hearing the knocking of balls, Amy looked up from her own game, and saw that the

children were all around Jack, who seemed to be doing something that amused the children greatly. She ran down to see what they were doing.

"Jack's found a hop-toad, Amy," said Phyllis, "and he's making it hop."

"He looks so funny when he hops," said Claribel.

Jack had a long switch, and was urging on the toad.

"Jack, that's naughty," said Amy. "You should n't hurt the poor thing."

"I don't hurt him any, Amy," said Jack, in his innocent-sounding voice. "I'm only tickling his back to make him hop."

"It frightens him, and he does n't like it," said Amy. "Now don't do it any more, that's a good boy, Jack."

"No, I won't, Amy," said Jack, who was very kind-hearted and generous, dropping his stick.

Here Professor Strong was seen coming along the street. As he drew near, he held up a letter with a significant smile at Amy.

"Oh, I wonder what it can be," said Amy, "Papa looks so smiling."

She ran to meet him, and read the mysterious letter. Soon she came running back, all radiant with happiness and excitement, to tell her friends the great news.

"Oh, girls," she cried, "is n't it perfectly splendid ? Philip has taken the island, — really ! and he and Gladys are going down the first of June, and we are going early in July ; and we shall stay weeks, I don't know how long ! And I shall see Sydney and Faith, and my dear little nieces ; and perhaps we shall go to Hackmatack, where papa lived when he was a boy,

and had such fun. I always wanted to go there so much. And I'm going to have a new trunk of my own. Mamma says I'm getting so big she can't get all my things into her trunk any more. Philip says Gladys is going to take her violin down, and he will take his guitar. Think of all the music we shall have. Oh, I am so happy I don't know what to do!"

After dinner, in the pleasant dusk of the warm evening, after seeing the chickens safely to bed, Amy, Kitty, and Irene, their arms laced around each other, walked up and down the pavement, talking over their summer plans,—Claribel and the little Goldschmidts tagging along behind, in humble imitation of the "big girls."

Irene was to have a long trip during the vacation with her father on his steamer. Kitty and Rob were going, as usual in summer, to their grandmother's farm in the country, about eighty miles from Cincinnati, where they always had delightful times. Laura was going up to the Michigan Lakes. After talking these plans over, Irene said,—

"Of course we shall have lovely times, Kitty; but I think Amy's will be best of all, it will be so romantic to be on an island."

"I think so, too," said Kitty.

"Yes," said Amy; "I can't help thinking so myself. Oh, I do believe I am the happiest girl in the world!"

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